Skills and Knowledge for Community Work:

Informing Social Work Practice for the 21st Century

Shelley M. Currie

University of Northern British Columbia

MSW Candidate

Shelley Currie, B.A., B.S.W.
Registered Social Worker
Alberta Association of Registered Social Workers

Practicum Supervisory Committee

Faculty Supervisor:
Glen Schmidt, B.A., B.S.W., M.S.W.
Social Work Program, Faculty of Health and Human Sciences
University of Northern British Columbia

Field Supervisor:
Margot Herbert, M.S.W., R.S.W.
Faculty of Social Work, Edmonton Division
University of Calgary

Committee Member:
Anne Lindsay, Ph.D.
Education Program, Faculty of Health and Human Sciences
University of Northern British Columbia

Abstract

The social work profession appears to be on the verge of another transition in its dominant practice assumptions and activities. This practicum report describes an Action Research approach to exploring the skills and knowledge base which may assist social workers in making the transition towards more community-based, community-focused social work practice.

The Children's Services Initiative of the Commissioner of Services for Children and Families in the province of Alberta provided the practice context for this research-based practicum. This report on the practicum experience includes a brief history of the Children's Services Initiative and a description of the larger social policy context of the Initiative.

The use of Action Research as a practicum framework is described. Themes emerging from interviews with four key participants of the Initiative are outlined. A schema of skills and knowledge relevant to community work is developed from these themes. Implications of these findings for social work practitioners and those concerned with the needs of children and families at risk are then explored.

For Bette and Elmer Currie
and for Toy Win and Glen Mah Poy...

who have taught us the challenges, responsibilities and rewards of living in community.

For the Staff and Volunteers of the Children's Services Initiative...

Your dedication and sacrifice have turned this Initiative into much more than anyone imagined - Thank You!

For Roger, Christopher and Peter.....

"It's all done. Let's go PLAY!"

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Chapter 1

I. Introduction to the Practicum Report

This practicum report and its presentation at the University of Northern British Columbia for response and critique are the culmination of a unique learning experience. During the Spring and Summer sessions of the 1996 academic year, I was given the opportunity to work alongside some of the many staff and volunteers of the Children's Services Initiative of the Government of Alberta. The practicum coincided with an important phase of the overall restructuring of preventative and protective services for children, families, and communities in my home province. As a practicum student, I was welcomed into the day to day operations of the Commissioner of Services for Children's regional office for Regions 8 and 10. Thus I also became involved in some of the work of the many, many volunteers involved in the Initiative's complex committee structure.

The report begins with a brief explanation of the rationale and key questions around which the practicum was developed. The history of the Children's Services Initiative is reviewed within the larger ideological context of the restructuring of government services, in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3, the research methodology used to give form to the day to day work is described and a brief summary of activities is provided.

The observation and interview processes used in the practicum are described in Chapter 4, followed by the review of key themes which emerged from the information gathered. Chapter 5 contains the final summary of the practicum report and some musings as to directions for further exploration for those interested in the delivery of services to children, their families and communities.

II. Why Develop a Practicum Within the Children's Services Initiative?

It has been argued that the major focus of social work practice is to effectively address the dynamic relationship between personal troubles and public issues. Franklin (1990) has reviewed the history of social work practice in North America this century and concludes that social work practice has a more cyclical nature. The profession tends to move between the two areas of practice priority - personal troubles and public issues. These priorities have in turn shaped the development of the distinct methods of practice: casework, group work, and community organization. While concluding that the profession needs to sustain a practice paradigm which is less influenced by socio-economic and political forces, Franklin also suggests that the next major cycle towards public issues and therefore community-level practice methods is emerging at the end of the 1990's.

The social work profession appears to be on the verge of another transition in its dominant practice assumptions and activities. As the profession moves beyond the Therapeutic Paradigm (Epstein, 1994) which has dominated its knowledge and skill base for the past four decades, social work practitioners are exploring past traditions and current social trends for insights into the future directions which the profession might take. Social work practice that is community-based as compared to bureaucracy-based, and community-focused as compared to individual and/or group-focused is one direction worthy of more in-depth exploration.

III. Practicum Objectives and the Research Questions

The work of the Commissioner of Services for Children appeared to be a unique opportunity to look at a major field of human services in transition and to explore with a

group of carefully selected individuals from a variety of personal and educational backgrounds what skills and knowledge seemed most relevant in their day to day work.

Three learning objectives were established for the practicum experience:

1. To learn through study and direct involvement, the use of action research methods in a multidisciplinary practice setting.

2. To participate in the work of the Facilitation Team and to engage in critical reflection upon my own practice skills in this type of social work practice.

3. To describe in writing the findings of this project in a manner which is of practice value to the Facilitation Teams and to the professional social work community, particularly those interested in community practice (as compared to social work practice with individuals, families, and small groups).

The primary problem to be addressed in the research aspect of the practicum was:

> What skills and knowledge base assist social workers in making the transition towards more community-based, community-focused social work practice?

The following questions were addressed:

I) What skills and knowledge bases do social workers and other professionals use in their involvement with a major redesign initiative in a sector of human services?

II) How do people describe these skills and knowledge bases?

III) Are there skills and knowledge that are unique to the professional social workers involved, when compared to workers of other professional backgrounds?

With these objectives and research questions as mutually agreed upon guidelines, involvement in the day to day work of the staff and committees was then negotiated throughout the course of the practicum.

IV. Skills and Knowledge in the Literature

Literature pertaining to community-focused practice skills was reviewed. Key words such as "skills", "practice", "knowledge", and "community" were incorporated into the search methods. As far as possible, information which referred specifically to the profession of social work was used. The results of this exploration are summarized below.

Twenty five years ago, Lappin (1971) described social work community practitioners as unique from other social work practitioners (e.g. those involved in individual and group work). He suggested that social work had become institutionalized as a helping profession, rather than as a political force, in the ongoing processes of social change within society. He argued, in keeping with Epstein (1994) and others, that while individual and group workers have had some success in institutionalizing their roles, community workers are uniquely challenged. "The community practitioner has been left largely to his own devices in his attempt to wrest a measure of role autonomy from his rather inhospitable environment." (Lappin, 1971, p. 135)

Lappin suggested that community practitioners must meet the following criteria of effectiveness in order to establish a legitimate role for themselves both within the profession and in the eyes of the community:

1. the ability to enter into a counseling role with community leadership.
2. the ability to help create social structures through which the community develops the capacity to mount the action necessary for achieving self selected goals.
3. skills in carrying out those management functions which contribute to the maintenance of the organizational system as a distinct and unique entity in the institutional structure of the community. (p. 142)

In a more recent article, Lappin (1985) summarizes the work of Johnson in the 1950's concerning community practice skills. Johnson's skills list included;

1. a cultivated sense of timing in bringing different groups into interaction with respect to goals the community is striving to reach.
2. the ability to maintain multiple relationships with leaders, group representatives and organizations simultaneously but independently.
3. the ability to distinguish between primary and secondary group relationships. (pp. 87-88)

Lappin has elaborated on Johnson's work and developed a categorization of what he terms "task roles" for community practitioners. His schema is included for reference in Appendix I.

Cox, Erlich, Rothman, and Tropman (1984) provide an overview of "tactics and techniques" applied in community work by a range of community organizers, including but certainly not limited to social workers. These skills are grouped into the following categories; assessment and option selection, mobilization and implementation, administrative leadership and management, and evaluation. Value and ethical issues arising for community workers are also examined in this collection.

Kurzman (1985) identified five broad areas of skill for "community developers"; organizational skills, strategic or political skills, analytic skills, relationship or engagement skills, and administrative or management skills. This author focuses on the first three skills areas as most important to community work. He writes;

> ...Organizational skills are required in order to ensure collective action that will have an impact on a social issue. Examples include the ability to identify problems, attain goals through program activities, establish an appropriate group or organizational structure, plan and conduct conferences and campaigns, and weigh multiple, competing concerns in order to establish priorities.
>
> Strategic or political skills are required in order to ensure collective action ...Examples include the ability to assess interests and commitments of parties

> to a transaction, identify internal and external sources of influence and power, strengthen the cohesiveness of one's constituency, and identify areas of conflict and converging interest among the parties. Implicitly necessary, therefore, are persuasiveness in both verbal and written communication, a talent for negotiation, and an ability to identify appropriate compromise positions...analytic skill implies the ability to study a situation or problem, to assess past efforts to deal with it, and to identify additional information which might be required. In addition, the worker must be able to define a focus relevant to the central issues which incorporates an assessment of both the opportunities and the constraints posed by the context of the situation. Finally, the community worker must be able to organize and systematically deal with the range of goals, strategies, and resources which may need to be devised to solve the problem, and then specify in detail the tasks which need to be performed, by whom and with what resources." (pp. 108-109)

Using a political action framework, Grosser and Mondros (1985) focused their attention on one broad skill area: that of affecting social and political conflict to facilitate desired outcomes. These "citizenship skills", as they label them, include: conducting meetings, engaging in group decision-making, building constituencies, and negotiating and taking leadership. (p. 160)

Rothman and Zald (1985) have developed a schema for skills and knowledge drawn from planning theory. It is included in Appendix II for reference. The broad skill categories include: managing organizational processes, exerting influence, conducting interpersonal relations, designing, expediting, and implementing. (p. 143)

With respect to community practice with First Nations groups, Solomon (1985) has summarized the skills identified by Brown and Gilbert as follows: knowledge of socioeconomic and political forces in Indian communities, including awareness of tribal codes, federal-Indian jurisdiction, Indian law and court systems, awareness of decision-making processes, Indian problem-solving ways, and an awareness that Indian tribes are distinct entities and cannot be lumped together. (p. 243)

Monk (1985) summarizes skills in the area of policy development inventoried by Lowy in 1979. These include: fact finding and information gathering, writing briefs, presenting expert testimony, conducting public information and education programs aimed at community sensitization and mobilization, organizing client groups, promoting coalitions, petitions, conferences and contacts with policy-makers, identifying viable channels of appeal, and, as the avenue of last resort, articulating protest campaigns. Lowy's work, it should be noted, was specific to the field of gerontology.

In addition to the above references, a literature search of Social Work Abstracts from 1977-1995 was also made. The summary of skills and knowledge bases drawn from these abstracts and the available journal materials was used to develop a draft taxonomy for skills and knowledge, included in Appendix III.

There is considerable literature available concerning the skills and knowledge base of and for social workers interested in community practice. Experiencing the application of that skills and knowledge base within a multidisciplinary practice setting mandated to facilitate major change in the field of children's services became the goal of the practicum. Prior to the practicum, no attempt was made to synthesize the various schema and models obtained through the literature. It was hoped that over the course of the practicum, themes would emerge from the doing of the work, through observations, and through interviews and dialogues with others which could be compared to the existing models in the literature. Priorities and limitations inherent to the particular work situation might emerge that could help shed light on the particular skills and knowledge needed by practitioners involved in shifting from current practice paradigms to those which are now emerging for the 21st century.

Chapter 2

I. A Brief History of the Office of the Commissioner of Services for Children and the Children's Services Initiative

The Child Welfare system in Alberta has been the subject of numerous reviews and inquiries. Issues have included appropriate minimum qualifications for case workers, practice standards, community and cultural issues, the role of community agencies, and most importantly, outcomes for children, their families and communities. In July, 1993, the Children's Advocate[1] completed an extensive review and evaluation of Services provided to children at risk and their families by Alberta Family and Social Services.

The Walter Report (1993), as the Advocate's final report has come to be known, called for a variety of changes. Three "fundamental change strategies" were specified; 1) decentralization of Child Welfare, Children's Mental Health, and Young Offender Services towards the operation and delivery of services at the local or community level, 2) the development of integrating and coordinating mechanisms at the local level toward achieving an effective and efficient continuum of "locally owned" programs and services adaptive to local needs, and 3) integration of central legislative, policy, funding, standards development, program monitoring, and evaluation functions at the provincial department level. (p. 317) The Walter Report echoed many of the findings of previous reviews and inquiries into the delivery of child welfare services. In turn, it helped pave the way for the emergence of the Children's Services Initiative.

[1] The first provincial Children's Advocate was appointed in 1989. The role of this formal advocacy service is to provide individual and class advocacy for children and youth who receive child welfare services. Bernd Walter was the third of four individuals who have been appointed to head the Children's Advocate program since its creation.

In the fall of 1993, the Government of Alberta appointed a Commissioner of Services for Children. The mandate of the Commissioner was and continues to be to design a new, more effective, and community-based system of support to children and families. Between December 1993 and June 1994, the Commissioner's Office carried out an extensive consultation process. The purpose was to determine key issues regarding the current service delivery system (i.e. government departments, schools, social service agencies, health centres, the justice system, volunteer, and other organizations) and solicit ideas regarding what a reformed system might look like.

Six Interim Working Groups were established to organize consultations and obtain input from communities in their assigned geographic areas. Additional focus groups with Aboriginal communities, parents, youth groups, professional associations, and special interest groups were arranged. In total, representatives from the Commissioner's Office and the Interim Working Groups held approximately 250 meetings across the province. A total of 212 submissions were made to the Commissioner's Office and many other submissions were made to the Interim Working Groups. Altogether, more than 3300 people from 65 communities participated in this initial process.

The Commissioner's Office also gathered information on efforts to reform services to children which had been made, or were underway in Alberta, in other jurisdictions within Canada, and in the United States and Europe. This information and the findings of the consultation process were submitted to the Minister of Family and Social Services in September of 1994. A series of "internal events" occurred in response, culminating in the departure of the first Commissioner and the appointment of the current one.

In November 1994, the Commissioner's Office released the document, Focus on Children, which outlined an action plan and timelines for reforming services to children. Four key areas of change were identified to be addressed in the redesign process; integrated services, community delivery, Aboriginal services, and early intervention. The Four Pillars (as they are now called) are described in detail in Appendix IV.

A timeline consisting of three major phases was proposed: Mobilization (December 1994 to March 1995), Implementation (April 1995 to March 1995), and Community Management (April 1996 onward). Details of the original action plan are included in Appendix V.

On November 30, 1994, Mike Cardinal, then Minister of Family and Social Services, announced that the government would establish 17 Children's Service Authorities with boundaries the same as those of the recently established Regional Health Authorities. (See map, Appendix VI) Within each region, a Regional Steering Committee would be appointed to coordinate a community planning process to develop a service plan for the region. Based on the service plan, a Regional Children's Services Authority would then be established to administer the new system in the region.

Six Regional Directors were hired by the Commissioner's Office in February 1995. The Regional Directors established the six Regional Commissioner's Offices and in March, 1995, began to hire teams of community facilitators to work with the Regional Steering Committees in developing their service plans.

The Commissioner's Office held a number of public information sessions across the province from February to May, 1995. The community facilitators began the work of organizing small Working Groups representing geographic areas within the various

regional boundaries as well as key stakeholders. In June, 1995, two co-chairs for each of the 17 Regional Steering Committees were appointed by the Minister of Family and Social Services from a pool of applicants. The Regional Steering Committees were appointed by the Minister, upon recommendation from the Regional Directors, in September 1995. The size and individual backgrounds of the Steering Committees vary from region to region.

The Child and Family Services Authorities Act was assented to on May 24, 1996. This Act enables the "Minister responsible" (a role yet to be clarified) to establish regional authorities and delegate responsibility for the design and delivery of services to children and families within their boundaries. It includes amendments to several other pieces of legislation, including The Child Welfare Act (1984), The Internal Trade Statutes Amendment Act (1995), The Conflict of Interest Act (1991), and The Social Care Facilities Licensing Act (1980).

In June, 1996, Mike Cardinal resigned as Minister of Family and Social Services and as a Member of the Legislative Assembly. A Caucus shuffle ensued, resulting in the appointment of Stockwell Day as Minister of Family and Social Services, and Pearl Calahasen as Minister Without Portfolio responsible for the Children's Services Initiative. The roles of the two Ministers relative to decisions regarding the Children's Services Initiative are not yet clear. Pearl Calahasen immediately began an exhaustive schedule of attendance at Steering Committees and Working Groups across the province. She has also met with key stakeholders and in particular with Aboriginal leaders and community members.

The planning processes of the 17 Regional Steering Committees have since evolved along their own unique time and process lines. Some regions have completed their Preliminary Service Plans while others have struggled to establish themselves as functioning planning groups. Early in her tenure, Pearl Calahasen announced her intention to have one or two regional preliminary service plans approved and the corresponding Regional Children's Services Authorities appointed by the fall of 1996. To date, no Regional Steering Committee has completed the planning work required to allow appointment of a Regional Authority to proceed.

The Steering Committees for Regions 8 and 10 which are the focus of this practicum experience are nearing the completion of the mobilization and information gathering stages of their planning work. Working Groups within these two regions are preparing final drafts of reports which document the concerns and recommendations of a wide range of groups and individuals within their areas. These reports are to be reviewed and reworked into preliminary service plans by the respective Steering Committees over the summer months. The preliminary plans will then be circulated to the Working Groups and key stakeholders for feedback. Final drafts will be submitted to the government for approval by January 1997.

The work of the Commissioner's Office and the Children's Services Initiative has evolved and changed since its beginnings in 1993. Some of the factors at play in this evolution of the Initiative include: 1) the responses of the government and other key stakeholders, 2) the departure of the first Commissioner and the appointment of the next, 3) other changes in key Commissioner's Office personnel, 4) the formulation and passage of legislation, 5) the change in the Minister of Family and Social Services, and 6) the

appointment of a Minister Without Portfolio responsible for the Initiative. Returning to the timelines proposed in Focus on Children, it appears that the Children's Services Initiative is drawing near to the end of the first phase, Mobilization, and the steps to be taken to move towards Implementation are beginning to emerge.

II. The Larger Context

The Children's Services Initiative is not occurring in a vacuum but within the context of a range of restructuring and reform activities mandated by the provincial government. Health, Education, and Social Services have been receiving particular attention. Each has undergone some form of regionalization of management and service provision.

In Health, 17 regional authorities, with boundaries co-terminus with the new Children's Services regions, were established in 1994. Local hospital and public health boards were abolished, and new Regional boards were appointed. Preliminary service plans for the 17 Regions were developed over a three month period. A primary focus of the plans was the implementation of significant budget reductions and reallocations across all areas of health service provision. The operationalization of the new Regional Health Authorities model and service plans is ongoing. It is also the focus of intense public debate.

A similar process has been undertaken in Education. A number of school boards have been amalgamated and Regional planning areas designated. These areas have somewhat different boundaries than those for Health and Children' Services. Provincial

funding for Education has been reduced, with the onus placed upon the restructured school boards to manage the implementation of the budget reductions.

The process of restructuring of Children's Services has been somewhat unique. The timelines for the establishment of the new regional authorities and the implementation of service redesign and budget reductions, though perceived by participants to be very short, are longer than those provided to Health and Education. The Children's Services Initiative is also unique in its mandated involvement of a broad base of community members in the planning process and, in particular, its mandated involvement of Aboriginal people at all levels of the restructuring process.

The restructuring activities of the provincial government are occurring within a complex web of social, economic, and political forces at work in many developed nations. Economic globalization has led to concerted pressure by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and other key creditors upon the Canadian government and its provincial counterparts to focus upon debt and deficit management. These pressures have in turn led to downsizing of the public service sectors, privatization of human services delivery systems, and a general devolution of responsibility for human services from the federal government to provincial governments, and from provincial governments to municipal governments, communities, families, and individuals.

The impact of globalization on developed nations has emerged as a focus of discourse among economists, political analysts, social welfare advocates, ethicists, community leaders, industry, labour, and a variety of groups within the "general public".

Social policy models like those being formulated in works such as Unfinished Business[2] and Reinventing Government[3] have become important sources for provincial politicians seeking politically acceptable responses to the pressure for structural adjustment to the globalized economy. Thus, themes of the globalization discourse are being echoed in documents of the Children's Services Initiative;

> The health, education, and social welfare programs which have taken shape through this century are a source of pride to Canadians and envy to many nations. In recent years, however, economic realities have drawn to a close the long history of growth in federal and provincial programs. At the federal level, the Government of Canada is reviewing its annual $70 billion expenditure in social programming. At the provincial level, governments across the county are in the process of "rethinking" or redesigning their services.
>
> The corporate sector, as well, is making dramatic readjustments in order to succeed, indeed to survive, in today's age of rapid change. Economic, political, social, and technological changes have created environments bearing little resemblance to those of even a decade ago. In an era of declining resources, organizations in both the public and private sectors have had no choice but to re-examine their objectives and the ways in which they meet them.
>
> Observers of the modern organizational experience have been calling for the *reinvention*[4], the transformation, the total re-engineering of systems, structures, and work processes. (Commissioner of Services for Children, 1994, p. 3)

The emergence of the Canadian First Nations movement and self-government as the model for decolonization of Aboriginal peoples also appear to be important aspects of

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[2]The author of this work is Roger Douglas, Minister of Finance of the former Labour Government of New Zealand. Published in 1993, it is an elaboration and evaluation of the outcomes of an early work, There's Got To Be a Better Way! (1980) in which Douglas outlined a method and model for restructuring New Zealand's economy to compete in the global economy.

[3] Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the Public Sector (1993) was written by David Osborne and Ted Gaebler. Osborne is a writer and consultant to various government leaders and candidates in the United States. Gaebler is a public-sector management consultant. They describe their text as a work about the pioneers of a new form of governance developing in the United States and beyond. This is in response to "the emergence of a postindustrial, knowledge based, global economy (which) has undermined old realities throughout the world, creating wonderful opportunities and frightening problems." (xvi)

the context of the Children's Services Initiative. While only nine percent of all children in Alberta are Aboriginal, nearly 50 percent of the children "in care" are Aboriginal. (Commissioner of Services for Children, 1994, p. 28) Analysis of the function of Child Welfare systems in the colonization of Aboriginal peoples has led to concerted efforts by many Aboriginal communities to assume responsibility for the management and delivery of child welfare and family support programs within their own communities. Many Aboriginal people see this as an essential first step towards self-government.

By the beginning of the Children's' Services Initiative, 21 Indian bands had signed agreements with the Alberta and federal governments in which they have assumed responsibility for the on-reserve delivery of provincial child welfare programs, or their own child and family support services. A number of other potential agreements have been under discussion. One Metis settlement has hired staff to deliver provincial child welfare programs and others were considering similar arrangements. The Metis Nation of Alberta Association has also signed a Memoranda of Understanding with five provincial departments. And in the larger urban centres, Aboriginal service agencies have been working on a contract basis with the provincial government to provide child and family services to Aboriginal people. (Commissioner of Services for Chldren, 1994, p. 27)

Clearly there is an impetus towards Aboriginal control of services to Aboriginal children, families and communities, within the broader framework of self-government. This impetus is reflected in the consultations leading to the Children's Service Initiative, and in the design of the Initiative itself.

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[4] Italics theirs.

The impact of globalization and the emergence of the First Nations movement are two aspects of the broader context of the Children's Services Initiative. A third aspect might be termed the "back to community" movement. In her recent book, No Place Like Home: Towards Sustainable Community Development, Marcia Nozick explores a topic of popular interest in the 1990's: "rediscovering the particularities of place, the reclaiming of home, community, and local responsibility through **sustainable community development**." (p. 7) She identifies five recurring themes in community based initiatives which together form an emerging model of SCD. These five themes are 1) working towards self-reliance, at the personal, community, and regional levels, 2) harmonizing with nature and with available materials resources, 3) attaining community control of decision-making and policy formulation, 4) meeting individual needs within the broader community context, and 5) building a community culture of shared values and goals.

Localism, as expressed in terms like "community control", "community driven", and "community based", continues to develop as a counterforce to the processes of globalization. It can be identified as a current theme in the social, economic, and political realms. And it has clearly become incorporated into the language and processes of the Children's Service Initiative.

Chapter 3

I. Action Research as a Practicum Framework

Qualitative analysis of the skills and related knowledge bases being used by key players in the specified change process (i.e. the Children's Services Initiative) was chosen as a framework around which to build this practicum learning experience. Recent works, such as Cawley and Guerard (1995), have demonstrated that qualitative analysis of practitioners' perspectives on their day to day work lead to useful insights into key concepts which shape that practice.

The following criteria were developed to guide selection of a specific qualitative methodology;

1. The methodology would be appropriate to the main learning goals of the practicum.
2. The methodology could be learned and applied with an acceptable level of competence within the time frame of the practicum.
3. The methodology could be explained to participants in plain language.
4. The methodology would not require a critique or evaluation of the host agency or the work which the student would be joining as a participant-observer.
5. The methodology would be sufficiently flexible to allow completion of the project given a number of possible scenarios, including the dissolution of the Commission and the Initiative itself.

After some exploration, the Action Research approach was selected as the methodology upon which to base the collection and analysis of "data" (e.g. experiences,

field notes, interview notes, and transcripts) for this particular practicum.[5] Action Research is a research process first conceptualized by Lewin (1952). It consists of a spiral of cycles of action and analysis. The four major phases in Action Research are: plan, act, observe, and reflect.

> The plan includes problem analysis and a strategic plan; action refers to the implementation of the strategic plan; observation includes an evaluation of the action by appropriate methods and techniques; and reflection means reflecting on the results of the evaluation and on the whole action and research process. (Zuber-Skerritt, 1991, xiii-xiv)

Action Research is based on the assumption that people can learn and create knowledge on the basis of their concrete experience, through observing and reflecting on that experience, by forming abstract concepts and generalizations, and by testing the implications of these concepts in new situations. This leads to new concrete experiences and the beginning of a new cycle. (Zuber-Skerritt, 1991, xiv)

This methodology has been further developed into a research approach in the field of education by authors such as Kemmis and McTaggart (1982), Carr and Kemmis (1986), and Elliott (1991). More recently, Hart and Bond (1995) have applied this approach in health and social care settings.

Action Research can be distinguished from its close cousin, Participatory Action Research. Participatory Action Research is a more commonly used methodology in community practice. It has developed as a means to engage researchers-as-change-agents

[5] I am grateful to Anne Lindsay for her advice and direction regarding methodology. Having described my learning goals and the intended setting, she recommended Action Research as a methodology which could be used to develop practice theory from experience, dialogue, and observation. This approach is conceptually similar to Grounded Theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1994). But, unlike Grounded Theory, Action Research uses plain language and easily understood research procedures; it is therefore more accessible to others with whom I would be working in the field setting.

and community members in collaborative change efforts. Research (i.e. information gathering, analysis, and advocacy based on shared conclusions) is used as a means to achieve community change goals. (Barnsley and Ellis, 1992). By comparison, Action Research can be applied to community change situations as well as those which focus less upon the change goals of community members and more upon the development of practice approaches (skills) and practice theory (knowledge) among professionals as they interact with communities.

In this particular practicum situation, the agreed upon goal was to enhance the community practice skills and knowledge of the student rather than to impact upon the ongoing activities or subsequent outcomes of the Initiative. The degree to which the student-researcher was to become directly involved in the community change process was not known at the outset. Further, the directions which the learning experience would take were not readily predictable. Action Research as a methodology provided a means of describing the purpose of the practicum in terms acceptable to the politically sensitive host setting and it formed a workable framework around which to organize the practicum activities as they evolved.

In hindsight, it would appear that one complete cycle of the Action Research process was completed during the course of the practicum and the subsequent writing phase. The Plan entailed development of the practicum proposal in consultation with the host agency and Practicum Supervisory Committee. The Action phase consisted of the practicum itself, with particular emphasis on gathering observations and engaging the facilitators in discussion and reflection on the skills and knowledge at work in our day to day activities. The Observation Phase focused on the formal interviews with the

facilitators. And the Reflection Phase encompassed the process of analysis of the four transcripts and completion of the practicum report.

II. Action Research Within Action Research

Early in the course of the practicum, it became apparent that the design of the Children's Services Initiative itself could be seen as a form of Action Research. From its inception, the Initiative had proceeded through what might be described as a series of plan-act-observe-reflect cycles. This practicum coincided with two major phases; 1) the end of an action and observation phase focused on gathering information about communities within the various geographically defined regions while observing community reactions to the Initiative as a whole, and 2) the beginning of a reflect and plan phase.

At the beginning of the practicum, the two Regional Steering committees and their respective teams of community facilitators were in the process of working with local working groups and focus groups to collect information about what people in their geographic communities and communities-of-interest thought was working and not working in the existing system of services for children. At the same time, demographic information, incidence rates, and service-utilization data were being collected from a variety of community and agency sources. This process approximated the steps outlined in the document titled Handbook I: Laying the Foundation (1995) which was provided to Regional Steering Committees by the Provincial Commissioner's Office.

By the end of the practicum, the information gathering phase outlined in Handbook I was nearing completion. The Regional Steering Committees and facilitators were becoming actively involved in organizing, analyzing, and reflecting upon the volumes of

information gathered. Plans for the next stage of the process (formalization of a preliminary service plan for each of the two regions) were also beginning to emerge, as outlined in Handbook II: Putting the Plan Together (1996).

III. Summary of Activities

The work of the Commissioner's Office in facilitating the redesign of services to children and families has been the subject of much public debate and scrutiny. The standpoint taken for this practicum was that the transition to more community-based and community-focused social work practice in the field of child welfare is both timely and desirable. The work of the Facilitation Teams and other key players in the redesign of Children's Services provided an historic opportunity to both participate in and study the skills and knowledge base used in the transition process in an area of practice traditionally claimed by social workers.

Given the sensitive nature of the work of the Office of the Commissioner and the Regional Facilitation Team, careful consideration was given to the design of the practicum. The focus of the research aspect remains the description and analysis of the skills and knowledge which professionals are bringing to the work, *not* the critique or evaluation of their work. This focus was made explicit in negotiating the placement with the Regional Director and field supervisor, and was reiterated throughout the course of the practicum. Another important trust-building feature of the practicum was the criterion of involvement of the main participants in the ongoing development of the research project. This involvement culminated in the critique and editing of the required practicum

report, including a veto over any content that might hinder the work of the Initiative and its staff.

The development and strengthening of trust between student and the many other participants in a work setting of this nature were fundamental to the viability and quality of the practicum experience. Once the parameters of the practicum were established with the host agency and field supervisor, the next stage in the trust-building process began with my somewhat unexpected arrival at the Regional Director's Office in Edmonton. A memo regarding my proposed practicum had been circulated at the Regional Office early in 1996. However, by the time I arrived at the office in early June, there had been a significant turnover in staff. The Regional Director was out of town and the support staff and facilitators in the office that day were not aware that I would be arriving. This necessitated some hasty explanations and phone calls to confirm my legitimacy. I was then immediately welcomed into their activities that day.[6]

The next few weeks involved meetings with the Regional Director and the various facilitators to review the practicum proposal and discuss how I might become involved in their day to day work. I began to attend regular meetings of the two Regional Steering Committees and other meetings and activities related to the Initiative. Over the course of the practicum, I moved from observing the activities of these meetings to participation, and eventually, some leadership/facilitation.

The research aspect of the practicum work was interwoven throughout the day to day work and is not easily separated. A few activities warrant specific mention. Early in the practicum, I circulated copies of my practicum proposal to the individual facilitators

[6] A list of the various activities of the practicum is provided in Appendix VII for reference.

and met with them individually and in small groups to review and discuss its content. This lead to some minor corrections and several interesting conversations about skills and knowledge as they related to the experiences of individual facilitators with the Initiative. These conversations helped me to formulate the approach I would take in the more formal interview process later in the practicum.

It was interesting to note how easily my research fit into the work-in-progress of the facilitators. A key example was a forum held for all members of Working Groups in Region 10. This took place on June 13, in my absence. The main question of my research project had been independently chosen by the forum planners as the basis of a group-building/get acquainted exercise for the event. Participants were invited to record their responses to the question, "What skills and knowledge do you bring to the Initiative?" on paper "bricks". Responses were then shared with other participants in small groups. This "brick activity data" was then passed on to me as a potential source in my analysis.

Another important aspect of the research process was my attendance at various meetings and activities as a participant-observer. While attending the various meetings, conversations and work activities of the Initiative over the months of June and July, I kept a log book of observations, questions and ideas related to the main research question. In late July, I met with all of the available facilitators for a "theming exercise". In groups of 2 or 3, the facilitators categorized my observations and comments using the categories developed by Rothman and Zald (1985). We then discussed these categories in terms of their fit with my observations and the experience of the facilitators to date.

The final major research activity involved formally interviewing the facilitators, Regional Director, and the office administrator. Four interviews with facilitators were

taped and transcribed. The remaining interviews resulted in written notes. All participants were provided with copies of their transcripts or notes which were then edited at their request. It became difficult, both in terms of interpersonal dynamics and in terms of respecting the unique contribution of each staff member, to determine who would be interviewed and who would not. The decision to interview each one but to only tape and transcribe four interviews was received as an acceptable compromise.

The preceding research activities produced a large amount of information which might have been used for analysis. After consultation with the Practicum Supervisory Committee, the decision was made to narrow the analysis to the transcripts of the four taped interviews. These four transcripts represented a range of perspectives; male/female, aboriginal/non-aboriginal, professional social worker/other professional, Region 8/Region 10, original staff/new staff, staying/leaving. All four interviewees were paid staff of the Initiative. Thus, the perspective of volunteer, community participants was not represented.

The contents of each transcript were split into paragraphs according to the researcher's best assessment of the skill or knowledge being discussed by the interviewee. Paragraphs pertaining to similar topics were then grouped together across interviews. These groupings were then given names to describe the common theme which appeared to emerge from each grouping.

The final stage of the research process which directly involved the participants was the presentation of the draft practicum report to four of the original participants on January 27, 1997 at the Regional Commissioner's Office. Participants who were unable to attend the presentation were forwarded copies of the draft report.

The material presented included the first three chapters of the report as contained here. The text of the four transcribed interviews was presented according to the key themes identified by the researcher. Participants were invited to read this material carefully and provide feedback as to whether the themes drawn from the text were accurate and whether groupings of themes made sense to them.

No feedback regarding the theming of the interview material was received. One participant queried why participant feedback on the accuracy or appropriateness of the themes and categorization done by the researcher was needed. This participant expressed that the analysis "belonged" to the researcher and participant feedback seemed unnecessary. This question was helpful in that it helped me to articulate that feedback received from the participants as to how I had made sense of their words was for me an important test of the validity and reliability of the analysis. This explanation made sense to the participant, however it did not result in any feedback being provided.

In hindsight, it would appear that three factors contributed to the lack of feedback on the preliminary theming of the interview data. A time-lapse of approximately five months occurred from the interviewing stage to the presentation of the preliminary categorization. Though the researcher was still very much engaged in the research process (i.e. reflection phase), there had been no contact with the participants since the end of the practicum placement. Thus the participants were disengaged from the research process and were being asked by the researcher to re-engage with little time for re-orientation to the research process.

Secondly, the presentation of the preliminary categorization coincided with yet another hectic time in the work schedules of the Regional staff. It was difficult for most of

the facilitators to make time for the one-hour presentation and discussion. Those who were present appeared to be interested yet anxious to move on to other meetings and tasks that day.

Finally, more traditional research approaches tend to direct the input and actions of the participants, rather than invite them to participate in determining the next phase of the research process. Being asked to provide input to the analysis of the data was therefore an unusual or unexpected request for the participants, particularly given the time lapse since our last contact.

Chapter 4

I. Participant-Observation and Interview Strategies

It was both interesting and reassuring to realize that gaining meaningful entrance as a participant-observer into a variety of situations would be relatively simple. Several factors appeared to be at work. First, the facilitators themselves approached their work in the community with notable openness, honesty, and willingness to work through issues. The rapport they had established with the various committees and groups with whom they were working was extended to me by virtue of my association with them as a practicum student.

One of the goals of the Children's Services Initiative was to actively and meaningfully involve a wide diversity of people in the planning and consultation processes. Visitors and newcomers were commonly present at committee meetings and other gatherings. My arrival and short-term participation was therefore not a new or unfamiliar event for most participants.

With each new situation, I was introduced, by an accompanying facilitator, by the chair of the given meeting or by myself, as an MSW practicum student working with the Regions 8 and 10 facilitation teams. I prepared a short letter of introduction which I circulated at meetings. This included a brief explanation of my practicum project and a phone number at which I could be contacted for further information. On one occasion, this approach lead to an unsolicited written offer by a meeting participant to be interviewed.

Perhaps the greatest challenge in the participant-observer role was the internal struggle I experienced over when to participate and when to observe. The needs of

children and families is a subject near and dear to me. I also had strongly held views regarding the politics of human services in my home province. It was therefore a challenge to determine when and how to participate in ways which would contribute positively to the overall change process underway. I was often conscious of the potential for my participation to skew the content or direction of the discussion at hand. At times, I felt immobilized. At other times, I experienced frustration that I was not contributing the skills and knowledge which I had to offer. Still at other times, I found myself questioning my participation and anxious that I had said or done "too much". An interesting insight which I gained from the formal interviews was that these same struggles were also experienced by the facilitators as they moved through their day to day work.

The formal interview process provided a welcome change to a more clearly defined role and structure of activity. The following open ended questions were used as a general guide for the interviews.

1) What skills and knowledge did you bring with you to the facilitator's role?
2) What skills and knowledge have been most useful to you?
3) Are there skills and knowledge which you have not used?
4) What skills and knowledge do you wish you had? Would you have used?

Most of the interviews took place in the Regional Office. One interview was completed over lunch and another over coffee at nearby restaurants. The style of interview was conversational, with varying degrees of digression from the main questions by the interviewees and free use of additional questions, prompts, and comments by the interviewer to facilitate the interview.

For the interviews which were not taped, I prepared written notes to which additions and changes were made at the request of the interviewee. The taped interviews

were transcribed by a paid, professional transcriber and checked against the original tape for accuracy by the researcher. Names, laughter, coughs, pauses, and other sounds were omitted from the written transcript. Once checked for accuracy, each transcript was reviewed by the interviewee and additions and changes were made. Overall, the degree of editing of the notes and transcripts was minimal.

II. Themes Emerging From the Research Process

As mentioned previously, I was surprised at how quickly the key questions of the research aspect of the practicum were incorporated into the work of the facilitators. This was information which I noted in the early weeks of the practicum but which I did not formally name until reading Patton's (1990) description of "sensitizing concepts". Briefly stated, a sensitizing concept is a concept that the researcher uses like a lens to bring complex and diverse "data" (i.e. observations, experiences, insights) into greater focus.

> These sensitizing concepts have their origins in social science theory, the research literature, or evaluation issues identified at the beginning of the study. Sensitizing concepts give the analyst "a general sense of reference" and provide "directions along which to look" (Blumer, 1969: 148).
>
> (Patton, p. 391)

In the context of this practicum, I entered the research context using the broadly conceived concepts of "skills" and "knowledge" through which to focus the practicum experience. Skills and knowledge were my sensitizing concepts. Several participants commented early in the practicum that they had not really thought about what skills and knowledge they had or how they were using those skills and knowledge in the work with the Initiative. My sensitizing concepts were quickly incorporated into their thinking and analysis of the day to day work. They became the topic of discussion in many of our

conversations. They were used in moments of reflection and self-evaluation on specific work activities. Sometimes, they were a source of tension-relieving humour when the teams were struggling with a perceived lack of direction or wondering if there would be measurable outcomes from their hard work.

> "And what skill would you call *that*, Shelley?"
> (we all laugh)

On a more personal level, reading Patton's definition of the term "sensitizing concept" was a welcome relief as I began the last few weeks of the practicum. I had not become directly involved in as many "tasks" around the office as I am accustomed to as a practitioner. I wondered if I was really doing enough to meet my stated objective of testing my own skills and knowledge.

I was also beginning to wonder what I was actually accomplishing as a would-be researcher. Was "qualitative analysis of skills and knowledge" really a worthy research topic? Was what I was doing of any real value to the work of the Initiative or anyone else? Discovering Patton's brief description of sensitizing concepts lead me to jot in the margins...

> now I know what I've been doing!!! August 6
>
> "social worker" as community facilitator
> facilitator as "social worker"

Not only had my participation in this stage of the facilitators' work produced a greater consciousness about where their work fit into the larger field of community practice; my presence and perspective as a Master of Social Work student had added yet another layer to the ongoing reflection and critique of "social workers" and "social work" as a field of practice inherent in the work of the Initiative. Child Welfare workers are

commonly referred to, by themselves and by the community, as social workers, regardless of their training or educational backgrounds. Much of the feedback received from focus groups and working groups centered around social workers and their role in the existing system of services for children and families. Much of this feedback was negative. Social workers, both by trade and by professional designation, were playing an active role in the work of the Initiative, both as active supporters and vocal opponents. At the highest level of the Commission's bureaucracy, the motives and validity of the profession were in question. The new Minister Without Portfolio herself had made offhand comments about the roots of the profession in consecutive open meetings of the Region 8 steering committee.

On separate occasions, two facilitators spoke with me privately about their concern that I not be mistaken about their professional identities. The expressed concern was that I had mistaken them for social workers. It was important to them that I know they were not social workers and did not call what they were doing social work. These conversations happened early in the practicum, when I was still finding my place as a student. I chose not to explore with them their definitions of social work or their beliefs about the profession. Of interest to me was that two of their colleagues who were engaged in essentially the same work activities were formally trained social workers who conceived of their work as within the realm of social work practice.

A number of questions arose from these experiences. What is a social worker? What makes one person a social worker and another not-a-social worker? Can the origins of the concept be reliably traced? What function was the critique of social work playing in the work of the Initiative? At what point do persons involved in an institutional system

become responsible and culpable for that system's failings? These are interesting questions for someone else's investigation.

III. Major Themes From The Interview Data

Nine major categories of skills and knowledge emerged from the analysis of the interview transcripts. Within each category, there were varying numbers of sub-themes, which are listed below each major concept. Excerpts have been taken from the transcripts to illustrate these subthemes. It is hoped that this will provide the reader with a clear picture of the major themes identified through the interview work.

I. Contextual Knowledge

The most frequently discussed area of skills and knowledge I have named Contextual Knowledge. As a group, the staff of the Regional Office had extensive knowledge of the provincial, regional, and community contexts in which they were working. Respondents had traveled extensively within the province. Most had worked in a variety of localities, both within larger population centers and in smaller, rural, and remote geographic communities.

> ...That also gave me a taste of the different District Offices (of Alberta Family and Social Services) in the different regions. Because we spanned 4-5 regions in the province...We ranged from High Level to Medicine Hat and there's about 26 (child welfare related) programs. So quite a range.

> ...that took me to communities right across Alberta. From the south to the north to central.

An important component of Contextual Knowledge which emerged in the interviews was the experience of having worked within the province for a broad range of human service agencies. These included provincial government programs, private

organizations, and aboriginal agencies. Through their previous work, the facilitators brought a collective base of experience and knowledge that spanned both the geography of the province as well as the range of human services being impacted by the Initiative. The types of human service worker roles noted in the transcripts included:

> community developer, probation officer, consultant to NNADAP (alcohol and drug additions prevention and treatment program for on-reserve aboriginal people), investigator with the Human Rights Commission, regional aboriginal relations manager for Alberta Family and Social Services, Child Welfare worker, casework supervisor, director of an on-reserve aboriginal child welfare agency, teacher, administrator at the elementary, junior high, senior high and college levels, and special education, special education consultant for the Ministry of Education, youth worker, and manager in a non-profit child welfare agency

It has already been noted that the Children's Services Initiative is not the first initiative of its kind in Alberta. Detailed knowledge of, and experience working with, a number of these previous initiatives was part of the knowledge base which informed the current work of the facilitators.

> ...the last three years I had become involved in interdepartmental community based initiatives through the Associate Deputy Ministers' Committee that basically was responsible for the "Coordination of Services Initiative" in the province...we were the drones...each one of us had responsibility for direct linkages with the sites that had been chosen...(I) sat on those steering committees (and) also got very much involved in working with interdisciplinary teams within the communities...that opened the door to working collaboratively, working in the policy area, working on project management type things...They were the things that made me interested in coming over to this position...That helped give me kind of an insight into that whole community focus approach that the government was starting to take.

> And I think that the other skill, although I don't know if you'd call it a skill, but just the credibility of having the experience of working in developing...an initiative that did really try and focus in on doing things in a different way...it was an advantage in that I had a bit of history in terms of supporting those kinds of things and actually lived through a lot of that stuff and that pain that you go through when you try to get collaboration among interdisciplinary types of groups.

At a more specific level, the facilitators seemed to be well versed in the history and structure of Alberta Family and Social Services, and particularly, the Child Welfare Program. This included direct knowledge and experience concerning high profile events which had helped give rise to the current Initiative.

> I went to another aboriginal agency...and I worked quite closely with the Department. And that was after those kids died drinking that fluid. So that's when there were all sorts of government agencies coming in, "what can we do? how can we help?"... So the Department, Alberta Family and Social Services, worked with me and I introduced the person who was doing the writing of the needs assessment. Took him up there and introduced him. He had never been up there and yet he's the person making plans for these communities...So I took him and introduced him to some of the community leaders and then from there he wrote a project. They gave us some money to hire local people there to do some youth program and some youth stuff and it was working when I left.

> I was hired on initially as a Regional Aboriginal Relations manager and what that role is, is sort of like a go-between, between the Department and the aboriginal community. Advising the Department on the aboriginal issues, advising the aboriginal community about Departmental policy - this is why they made these decisions. Explaining all of that. I was just catching on to my job, three months into it, when this Initiative, this re-design of Children's Services was announced by Cabinet...So all of us got letters saying that we will be working with the Children's Initiative by secondment over to the Commission.

> I brought 10 years working in child welfare for a non-profit agency. So I have experience with a range of child welfare related processes and an understanding of where people are coming from, having worked in the old order before the new order.

Awareness of, and the ability to work with, the culture and institutional protocol of government was noted both as something which facilitators brought with them and which they were acquiring through their work.

> ...When you're working in hierarchy...there is a level that you go to, right? Like you go to your immediate supervisor, then you go to that one person, then you go there. Me? those are blurred, there's no boundaries like that where I come from. I need to talk to someone that can help me,...so I call him, bypassing my boss, getting into all kinds of trouble...I've never understood why. Until now. I

> guess you could say, I've been a little bit more socialized in the higher echelons of society, what they call it. These are do's and these are do not's...No, I still have problems with it, but I'm trying to be respectful too now of the dominant society's cultures...I guess if I want respect for my culture, I gotta be able to show respect for other peoples' cultures too.
>
> ...having worked within government and knowing how government works was probably useful. All tied in with having contacts with the departments and so forth, to be able to tease out...the real focus of what a message is. I think having had the experience of writing public announcements for (a) Minister helps one to understanding how--it's just knowing government, knowing a bit about the bureaucracy, knowing what's acceptable and what's not acceptable in terms of language...being able to in a way weed out between...almost to be a little bit cynical...knowing what's achievable and what's not achievable, to know in reality that government, although it seems like they are consulting the community, they are indeed not turning the whole responsibility over to the communities per se.

An important aspect of knowing the workings and culture of the Department is, as one respondent put it, "knowing who's who in the zoo." This involves not only knowing the names and roles of key players, but also their histories of involvement in decision making, and their professional and personal biases.

> I think it's has been helpful in that it's been easier for me to phone up someone from Health or Early Intervention or someone from Justice. You know if I need some information or to sit down with them...It is easier if you know the people. It is easier to open the doors and make contacts and get the information.
>
> The other area would be, although I had a fairly broad network of contacts, I lacked contacts within Social Services...more at the program delivery level...I think that's been a bit of a detriment...Except I've known a few key players... So I knew which side the bread was buttered on with some players. Who was playing the political games and who could be really trusted to give me information.

It is a commonly held belief among human service practitioners in the greater Edmonton region that there are unique characteristics of the region resulting from its proximity to the provincial legislature and provincial-level offices of the various

government departments. Knowledge about this uniqueness in comparison to other regions was discussed by some of the respondents. It was noted as a useful piece of Contextual Knowledge.

> Edmonton region has always been different. Similar to what you experience in this office because you're right at the seat of government. You have your Minister here, everyone's much closer and has a much, more of sense of a spotlight being on them. The further you move out, the greater you will see, in increasing proportion to the distance away from Edmonton region, the personality of the different district managers and regional managers. Whoever's in charge sets the tone. And so things that were OK to do in Medicine Hat would not be OK in Camrose. And so really needing the whole political piece...
>
> ...And even it would be interesting to look at how things different in Calgary. In Calgary, the government had much more support than it did in Edmonton. Does that make a difference?

There is a history of "initiatives" within Alberta that impacts on the current Children's Services Initiative. Part of this history is the development of resistance to major changes in policy and service delivery. The ability to identify and work with this resistance appeared to be a very important skill for the facilitators is this Initiative.

> ... but also not just knowing our aboriginal culture, you need to know the history of some of the things I was able to explain. Like there was a lot of fear, a lot of skepticism when this Initiative was announced...So I was able to bring them to there; this government taking away the responsibility from families and communities is not good. We just perpetuate government's responsibility for everything...We have to take back that responsibility, for our children, for our family, for our community. That's where that responsibility belongs...So those are the kinds of things I will speak about in working groups, to try and allay some of the fears of this process.
>
> It was more like "here's a trip that we're going to take, we want to be more community based, children focused etc. etc." But how to get there was never quite clear in people's minds, at least in the very beginning...a lot of the work that I found myself doing was building trust within the communities that I was trying to work with. So, I don't know what kind of skills you need for that other than to be as organized as you can. When you say you're going to do something, you do it...And I think by being a good listener and by carrying the messages

back and forth between, by being a good link between the Steering Committee in those early days when their learning curve was going up, helped establish some trust for the community.
...That was probably one of the biggest challenges coming in. Having to deal with the ongoing day to day criticisms of government around regional Health Authority changes and the lack of trust...It was difficult for me as a facilitator because you had to be so careful that you didn't take ownership for that kind of stuff or protesteth too much that government wasn't going to do that again because you have no idea what the real agenda is of government...It was really a hard sell so I think patience was a....virtue. Patience, honesty,...to work through that dynamic of government bashing, reaction, dealing with it as a political kind of a process...

I don't know if you'd call it a skill but at least the experience having been a teacher...the last 10-15 years have been really basically a revolution...in terms of reform of education, back to the basics movement, and the feelings that that brought as an educator...In a way, that experience of internalizing those things in terms of being not a good teacher, or part of a system that isn't doing a good job. I think that's helped me have a better understanding of where social workers are coming from right now...So I guess understanding that now gives me a better feeling personally to say, "You know, I've been through this before. I know what it feels like as a professional to feel like your profession is being devalued and marginalized."

My own experience on the service providers side and just even with service users, there's tremendous distrust...There have been other initiatives and we're also operating in the current political climate. The majority of people, particularly service users, are deeply suspicious of this government and what their motive is.

II. Knowledge and Skills Relevant to Work With the Aboriginal Community

The next major category of concepts that emerged from the transcripts I have named Knowledge and Skills Relevant to Work With the Aboriginal Community. The foundation of this aspect of skills and knowledge was knowledge of the history of aboriginal peoples, particularly those for whom Alberta is home.

You really need to know your aboriginal stuff. You need to know the history of aboriginal peoples, of First Nations, the treaties, what is it that brought...the aboriginal populations (to) now. We're in a place of pain, we're in a place of hurting. You've got to understand how we got here.

> ... Like the land-based groups are choosing not to be very involved in the discussion but maybe my involvement and history with that has probably helped the Steering Committee, and in particular some members of the Steering Committee, to have a better understanding of where they're coming from and that sort of thing.
>
> ...one of the areas that I wish I had more knowledge is the whole area of aboriginal issues...Like in terms of understanding the history of the treaties, the letters of memorandums of agreements, all these kinds of things that impact (our) stuff. And just to understand the aboriginal politics was something that I'd really never had an awful lot to do with. Oh, I'd worked with aboriginal families, more on one to one, or small communities, but never as the Metis Nation, or the Treaty 6 or whatever.

Knowledge of the history of aboriginal peoples formed, or was being sought as, a foundation from which to address bigger challenges in the day to day work of the facilitators. Respondents were taking that knowledge and working through its impact upon themselves as individuals. This process was leading the various facilitators to a new or greater awareness of themselves in relation to "aboriginal issues", and the impact which their personal responses to those issues might have upon their work with others.

> An aboriginal person has to be whole and healed. At least have an awareness of where their buttons are. When they're getting pushed. To know where it's coming from. So you need a healthy person, number one, and someone that's not afraid to take a risk. To call things, to say no, no, that doesn't sit right with me. And also on a bigger issue, to challenge at the highest level. You can't have...fear of doing that.
>
> ...one of the things that I, at the very beginning, talked to individuals, other facilitators on staff (about) and said (was), "Look we really need an introduction, an Aboriginal Affairs 101 here." Like really quick and snappy and it was always "Yes, we should do that." But...it never happened. I guess we're just off and running too fast to do things.
>
> ...I did not anticipate the impact of personal agendas impacting the political agenda. Do you know what I mean? The ability of people to put it aside. I just think it's really, really complicated. And I think it's the hardest area to impact because if it's someone's personal stuff, it gets much more loaded to confront. And if it's someone's personal stuff and they're aboriginal then forget it. If I'm non-aboriginal, I can't. So your aboriginal leaders need to be really well chosen

and if they're not it can just make the whole thing really difficult. So I'm doing a lot of learning around that.

Another aspect of knowledge and skills relating to work with and on behalf of aboriginal groups can be described as knowledge of and respect for aboriginal cultures. Beyond knowledge of the history of relations between the first peoples and the dominant society, and awareness of where the individual "fits" in relationship to that history, respondents spoke of the importance of understanding aboriginal cultures and practicing respect in dealing with aboriginal groups.

> ...it is really crucial to know the culture also, the spirituality...I've had to have those experiences to be able to speak to it. They need to be traditional. I believe, in many ways to know what a pipe ceremony is, to have experienced a pipe ceremony, to have experienced a sweat. The very basics of our spirituality.

> ...and also language...I wouldn't have got on in Region 8 had I not had my Cree language. There are a group of people in and around Hinton who call themselves the original people. They have been known as the traditional people, who don't speak English at all.

> And to know our protocols that's key in this role, that they know protocols. ...Just those kinds of things that you need to learn from the elders...I did my presentation...about this Initiative in Cree and it took me a whole afternoon and a lot of questions back and forth and they met the traditional way and to respect that. Now somebody else would probably have been offended and tried to attempt to get those other people in the other room into the same room as these ones. See if you don't know how they operate, they still operate the traditional elders' council. The 13 elders came in and sat in the room, the rest of the 12-13 people that attended the meeting sat in the other room. That's the way it's done. They listen, that's all they do. Now another facilitator, that has no awareness, would have probably brought in more chairs and tried to get those people to come into the room.

The unique and problematic relationship between Child Welfare services and aboriginal peoples has been a major focus of the Children's Services Initiative. By identifying and mandating attention to the needs of aboriginal children, families, and

communities, this Initiative has brought to conscious attention very real challenges in redefining the relationships between aboriginal groups and the dominant culture. The persuasiveness of institutional racism and interpersonal prejudices has been laid bare in a way which appears to be new to many participants in the process. The willingness and the ability to address racism and prejudice in the day to day work emerged as yet another aspect of knowledge and skills relevant to work with the aboriginal community.

> ...If they're going to hire an aboriginal person, there need to be supports in place...because to me, this Department, I have never seen such systemic racism. It's built in. They don't even have a clue that they're racist.
>
> ...There are many aboriginal people who are afraid to take a risk. My counterparts in some regions did not deal with the things I did, simply because it was a survival mechanism within the Department. They learned to survive so you don't raise issues or some areas, you don't take risks because you're not popular...I took risks...I felt the repercussions...
>
> One aboriginal agency, they're aboriginal owned and operated, but they hire non-aboriginal people. So that was a criticism. "They say they're an aboriginal agency but they hire white people." "That's not the point." I said. ...The fact is that they're aboriginal owned with aboriginal concepts and if they can train the non-aboriginal workers too in the aboriginal way to a more holistic view of giving services to kids, that's a real plus. Cause not only are your aboriginal children getting better service, but also in the process you're doing that cross cultural training.
>
> ...It's never ending. On a daily basis. No matter where you go. In the working groups, some very racist comments... So I've gone there and I've had to deal with the racism. The comments made by very highly educated people in the group saying, "Why do these Indians have to get money to learn about their culture?" To me, that's really racist. Because they don't understand. This is why you need an aboriginal person whose whole, healthy, and understands our history so that they can respond in an appropriate way to comments like that...And again, being able to say that in an non-angry manner...
>
> ...(it) is a very difficult thing to translate to people. This is the part I really have a difficult time with...I feel like because I'm not in a place of authority or whatever, I don't feel that I'm able to get myself understood...they don't look at me as a person speaking from authority. So what I do is I collect research, copy it and hand it out....Because that's the voice they understand. It's academia, and

they understand that. It's published in such and such journal.

Participants spoke of the kinds of situations in which issues of prejudice and racism were being confronted. A notable addition to this theme was one participant's comments on the need to be able to place knowledge and skills relating to aboriginal issues within the context of the multicultural society which Alberta has become.

> ...But also I guess one of the skills you need to have, you've got to be able to think multicultural in nature, it's not just about the aboriginal. In the facilitator role, in the type of a role like this to me, it is crucial that you don't have anybody that's biased in any way about cultures. The person has to be very non-judgmental and to have some awareness of other cultures and to respect that...to come to an understanding we are all peoples here, we are all trying to, want the same thing, a decent life. That's all we want, and to understand that there are different ways of getting there. And to also know not to judge other ones, to know that we don't all comes from the same belief systems.

Work experience with aboriginal communities and organizations was another component of this broad category which received attention from the respondents. The knowledge and skills developed through these experiences helped inform the work in which the facilitators were now engaged on behalf of the Initiative.

> ...in our region there's an ongoing discussion and dilemma about the involvement of the aboriginal community ...And so given my background and working in that community...I guess I've used (that) a little bit to reach or to make connections with some of those quarters, namely (a native organization) and some of the bands around here that I have personal knowledge from before. And so then I've been in touch with all of those people since being here. And so that would probably (be) made easier with the history I have with them...I met with (a) board and some of its members and...was able to...connect with them and see where they wanted to go....

> At the (agency), we had a significant portion of the population who were aboriginal...there were several families that I dealt with in social work situations from the various regions and areas that sent the kids to (the agency)...I guess, in a very general way, that...has provided some knowledge, experience and awareness of kids and families that are in need or in crisis.

> I wish I had a greater knowledge of some of the aboriginal, not the issues, but working with aboriginal people and that kind of stuff. That's a real learning curve for me cause I never have. I'm not sure what's out there that I can learn, but just having had more experience would help.

III. Workplace Survival Skills

I struggled to find a concise description of the next category of skills and knowledge. Workplace Survival Skills seemed to be the most appropriate descriptor for skills and knowledge that pertained to being employed as a facilitator in this or similar initiatives. The ability to advocate for oneself and one's colleagues as an employee was the first example noted.

> ...And I see many of my counterparts, many got burned,...three of them left... This is why your supervisor plays a key role in how you can function. I have seen my counterparts put in an office, not allowed to travel, not allowed to do this, not allowed contact. Why are they there then? It was token. Just so they can say, well we hired an aboriginal person...Our major part of our job is travel in the communities. You're not doing your work if you're sitting in an office ...There has to be an understanding number one that this role is key. And if you have a supervisor that believes it's key, I think the support comes. It took me a while to get the support that I need here but it came. But again, that's personal stuff that you do on your own, in talking and not giving up.
>
> You see, I still also maintained a lot of my job functions with the Department even though coming over here. So I was playing with a dual role in two regions...and then finally it got to be a bit much. A year ago, I said, "No I can't go to that." because my role was getting greater and greater. Becoming involved in working groups, being responsible for working groups in two regions. So, it's how do you spread yourself?
>
> That there's more supporting each other in saying what's our unified voice and presenting that to (our director). Instead of people all standing alone...

I began the practicum with the Regional Office shortly after recovering from a serious bout of pneumonia. Complying with doctor's orders to "go easy" created several dilemmas regarding keeping apace with my placement colleagues. It was interesting to

explore with them, in the interview process, the very real challenges of coping with the hours of work of their employment.

> ...and sometimes I haven't been sharp, because when you work 15-16 hours a day you're not always the sharpest...But it's an expectation as a facilitator in this job... And you're to perform 15 hours a day at an optimum level.
>
> ...There was lots of negativity, I think, 'cause people were tired and burnt out and work sacrificed. Weren't doing their own self-care and were getting mad and so shifting like. That's not where I work from. I really like my job. I like being here. I take ownership over that what I can change...
>
> One of the things that really struck me...when I came...it seemed like people have really poor boundaries around their work ethics. People worked all day, all night, just endless. What I learned a long time ago is it's a black hole. I could work until I burned out and never make a difference...So when I came here I was really comfortable with my own system...I do the prioritization and if I need to work 12-14 hours to achieve my priorities, I do and then I book time off and I take time off. That had a real impact on the office and I think it caused some bad feelings with some people. With some people it was like an empowerment, wow, if one person can do it, why can't I? It's almost like some role modeling that hadn't been there...there were times when I almost felt guilty for doing good self-care around work, and the thing is, I do my job. So it felt strange to me.

Another very real challenge of this type of employment was coping with the ambiguity of the overall process and, therefore, of the facilitator's role. As the work of the Initiative has progressed, the expectations and challenges of the facilitator role have changed and evolved. This does not appear to have been a particularly planful or smooth process.

> I had lots of experience working in an environment where there is a lot of ambiguity...but that was nothing compared to the ambiguity in this environment. And I like to be comfortable, know the party line, know the position, and that is like sifting sand in this environment. But it's not bad, I don't mind it too much. It just adds to the interest and complexity of things... But I don't know if you can come with a particular skill. I think the only thing is that over time you kind of learn the ins and outs and become familiar with the whole environment, and what (--)'s position or feeling or the way (--) ends to view things, similarly the Steering Committee and everybody else.

> ...I think it was sort like Topsy, it grew. Our working groups started...prior to the Steering Committee being appointed and so a lot of the work was...spinning of wheels, a lot of effort expended without an awful lot of gain, and we lost a lot of impetus and momentum because I think people didn't know where it was going...that's what drove me nuts at the beginning...it's like "Ready, shoot, aim!" That's the way I felt. Like before where I worked, it was hurry up and wait, plan, write down, propose, wait for approvals, develop, rewrite. You'd drive yourself crazy doing this, but at least when you went out to the public it was fairly solid.

Today's professionals are encouraged to adopt a "learning through life" approach to their professional roles. Being able to assess one's own learning needs and seek out appropriate educational resources appeared in the interviews as another necessary component of the work survival skills set.

> Now what do I need in my life to improve my skills? I need good writing skills, I need this, I need that. Now what job will give me that? So then I did a bit of research...I guess you could say in a way I would get the job that would give me the opportunity to train for that. I never came into a job where I was trained (before I started). Opposite, you know.

> I wish I had more training in community development just for my own understanding of the language of what I'm doing and also for my own reassurance...So much I do is just my own intuition of what I think is right, is just the way I work. What makes sense to me, but it's not necessarily something I've learned or been taught or confirmed. I wish I had that.

One of the stated objectives of the Children's Services Initiative has been to engage a broad spectrum of people in the planning and decision-making processes. Facilitators were responsible for ensuring that strategies were designed and used to meet this objective. Yet facilitators themselves struggled with the question of when and how to participate in the process, particularly when they had practice knowledge and experience that might inform or clarify the input of "the community". This was noted from time to time during the practicum as a source of stress for the facilitators.

> You know, there is a party line on all kinds of different things and you kinda have to go with that. And sometimes I feel envious of everybody else. It

> seems like everybody else in the world except us as facilitators gets to speak their mind and blather at anything they want. But us guys, we kinda have to constrain ourselves and kinda basically hold the party line...People come in and say this and that, and things that you know are incorrect misconceptions. And so, well that's community input, so you kinda have to write it down...you don't want to contradict them in front of all these people and say "what are you talking about? you're wrong." So you let it slide. And that's hard. That's a very specific skill.

The long term outcomes of this Initiative are not easily discernible to those who are doing the work, either as employees or as volunteers. For the facilitators, the ability to focus on and find satisfaction in long term and unclear outcomes appeared to be an important factor in their decision to continue on in the facilitator role, rather than to seek employment elsewhere.

> ...it's really takes patience...I think that's one of the key things is that if you're trying to rush something when you're looking for consensus, you're going to be very, very frustrated. It's a long time to develop shared values, a long time to develop that trust and it takes longer than three years...I think it's a wonderful, exciting opportunity that communities have that will pay off dividends over the next decade....It has to be open ended. It has to be allowed to go where it naturally will go.

The pace of work of the facilitators was, with rare pauses, very intense. The work involved long hours, short and often shifting timelines, and little time to coordinate one's activities and findings with those of the other facilitators. Yet working as a team appeared to be essential to both the quality of the work being done and the well-being of the facilitators as people.

> We have a whole group of people that are out doing different things. So needing to have an ability to be sensitive to what does my director needs to be briefed on, who needs to be kept up to date. A constant awareness that I'm not working alone.

> Thank goodness this has helped me to work in a team approach. Where I come from, our structures are very flat. This is the way I was raised. There is no hierarchy. I was taught from day one by my grandparents in Cree. "You

never put somebody on a pedestal or higher up. We're all same." But everybody demands a certain respect for whatever...My grandmother said "A drunk has the same respect as somebody who is a judge because its human life...You may respect the judge for the hardship of getting where he's at, but so did the drunk work hard to get where he's at. He's gone through the same pain and suffering too, to get where he's at...You know to never look down on anybody, never look up at anybody. It's respect, period."

It seemed like there's a tendency with the group to just do whatever. Like whatever (--) said, they did. I mean there was some discussion, but most people didn't talk it through in terms of "is this realistic or isn't it" or working as a group. (--)'s definitely the leader, and that's very appropriate. It's also appropriate for the colleagues to work as a team.

And also I think you need assertiveness within the team to talk about the groups that I'm working with, what they've talked about, what their needs are, to represent that voice. I think that to have a non-assertive facilitator would mean that the people out in communities' voice wouldn't get heard in the Steering Committee.

Getting the work done was of course a major priority for all of the facilitators. Given the short timelines for each of the phases of the project, the ability to organize one's workload effectively was a critical skill for survival in the workplace.

The other thing...is organizational skills. There's the whole paperwork kind of thing that it's not just enough to work well with people, there's a whole paper trail that's required and I find I'm constantly needing to be well organized and use my time really efficiently.

So, for example, when I think what's happening with...getting ready for our sub-committee work and looking at where everyone's at and having this meeting and (--)'s in a rush and so it's just fast, fast. And I worry about what the end results are going to look like. Cause it could be just like a dogs breakfast...So I guess my management skills, in terms of supervising and coordinating and sort of working through staff issues, goalsetting, aren't being used.

So to me there's a real difference if I work until 8 o'clock tonight and it's done versus working until midnight every night and I'd never be ahead. So I had to learn how to live with being two steps behind, ten steps behind and being able to evaluate what's OK to be behind on and just constant prioritizing.

Another thing I think about is organizational skills in terms of how the office

is organized and how some of the systems work. I probably would have done it a bit differently. But it's not my place to get in there, so I do what's appropriate within my own level.

IV. Interpersonal Skills

Interpersonal skills, the ability to form working relationships with individuals and groups, are perhaps the core of community practice, around which other aspects of the work are layered. The facilitators identified several interpersonal skills as key components of their work with the Initiative. The first involves the development of working relationships with the many people with whom one comes into contact.

> ...I believe (I haven't studied this so I don't know)...that whatever you do, particularly in community development, it rests on the individual relationship first. And so...as a community worker it's not about going out and working with a large group, it's the individual relationships I can build that's a critical strength because engaging people individually is an important skill especially in this process as there's tremendous suspicion.

> Well I would say probably the top skills would be the people skills. The ability to work with people, engage people, help facilitate their process would be the top ones and then everything else just assists that.

Having drawn people into the process through individual relationship, the facilitator then has the task of helping groups of individuals develop a shared code of conduct.

> And I guess the other thing that I don't use is my knowledge of group skills, setting group norms and that short of thing. I joined late. I didn't start any working group myself and...I see lots of things going on in the Steering Committee that for someone whose trained in running groups and facilitating ...you know?...It's slippery though in fact because it's not a therapy group. But any group of people coming together and working that closely at such important goals...it still surprises me that I don't walk in that group and see the norms on the wall ...that they never sat down and said "OK, what are our rules as a group? How are we going to work as a group?" And have that up so people can reference it. I think it would make a huge difference. For at least people feeling safe to bring things to the table.

In addition to developing group norms, the facilitators were involved in establishing and, from time to time, redefining their roles and functions within each group.

> Where our role seems to be less clear (is) then taking that information that we got from the community and in some way seeing that the Steering Committee ...has got the information. And that is done by way of Steering Committee meetings and workshops and all the rest of it. But it's that second piece that I know that our Steering Committee has had discussions about. What our roles should be as it relates to them as Steering Committee members. Right now, I talked about the day care meeting that we had...and then there was a comment that us facilitators should have less of a direct role...have less input into the content of the material...the Steering Committee is somewhat unsure or maybe not clear how to best utilize the facilitators that are here and so then we get conflicting messages as to what our role and conduct and input and so on should be.

Each group (i.e. working group, focus group, committee) is a unique mixture of individuals. Each member brings his/her own experiences, assumptions and group behaviors. Understanding human behavior, in all its complexity, is therefore a necessary skill in facilitating the work of groups, whatever their stated purpose is.

> And I really learned about the real social problems that some of the people come with. I didn't understand about human behavior but I've always had this real interest and burning desire...What is it that makes people tick? Anyway, it helped me to understand that a little bit, but it opened up like wow, there's so much I don't know.

> I'd like to think, before I came here, that I wasn't a real black and white kind of person. Surprise! It's pushed me even more into the gray areas... in my old job, I had a clear role so it was pretty easy for me to line people up on which side - either you're for or you're against...But in this position...I'm really challenged to see each person, no matter how they're behaving or how they're presenting...of really understanding that they're being motivated for some reason, and...not just writing people off.

> ...A critical piece for how I operate as a community facilitator is my beliefs around how and why people behave as they do. Because that's going to shape how I interact with them. If I believe that the Steering Committee is just out there making lives difficult...Or are they a group of people, all of them struggling to find their way?...it's something I hadn't thought a lot about before...but I've been challenged.

Conflict is an integral part of the dynamics of most groups. Beyond understanding and skillfully working with each individual within a group, the facilitators were also challenged to deal with conflict that emerged between group members, and between groups within the organizational structure.

> ...And then again how to deal with conflict in a group, the more interpersonal skills that you need when you have groups of people coming together with very divergent views, even values, and to try and make sure that everybody feels welcome...And it takes a tremendous amount of skill and sharpness... That makes it hard. Things will go by you. Oh, oh, I should have responded to that in this way. You know, as you're driving home or something like that.

> ...Like my co-worker. She has just this wonderful way about her. "OK, this is what you said, this is what you said. How do we do this?" (She) has that skill and ability...it's like she just has such a way of putting things together and kind of summarizing and kind of...that's a skill I need to develop.

> And then there would be a kind of settling out of the roles and stuff...And there were, I understand, fairly good personality conflicts among some of the facilitators with some Steering Committee members, and among themselves and all this kind of thing, you know, and with some of the communities, and stuff like that. So they went through some rough patches.

> ...I did take some training in mediation and I've found some of the skills that I learned in that to be useful in terms of dealing with some disputes at the working group level.

One of the challenges of an initiative of this type is to ensure the meaningful involvement of a wide range of community members. Much of this work is done through group gatherings (e.g. committee meetings, focus group brainstorming sessions, and working group activities). Facilitating these meetings to obtain optimal participation is a skill essential to the success of the entire project.

> ...my experience is more like in formalized meetings...where you're dealing with agendas and so on. So...managing a larger group and managing the discussion and keeping things on track is something I have to work on.

...to be able to communicate, and also being able to listen to what people are saying and try to extrapolate or pull from that the common points with other people...one of the biggest pieces for people is to feel heard and I think I can usually do that because I'm able to reflect back to them what they are saying. Whether or not I agree is not the point. And also I'm very assertive. I'm able to do leadership stuff but I'm also able to sit back and let things go which I think... is a strength too.

I also believe my ability to be genuine and upfront is an asset. I have an extroverted personality where I generally enjoy people and can connect with people in a genuine way and they know that. I think it is a skill...and also the fact of being very intuitive, in knowing when things are happening. So for example if I'm running a group, people don't necessarily have to say something. You just pick up on their non-verbals and you can check out with them. So that really allows for more inclusion and eventually over time, people feel more comfortable about speaking out but at first it's critical for people to feel involved in the group...

...I think a lot of it is who you are, not how you practice...In our aboriginal community, whether Metis, Blackfoot, or whatever, we have many similarities in our culture, the values. It's who you are. Are you respected? Are you honest? How have you been? You're watched through the years. What kind of person you are? Have you always been honest? Have you always been fair?

...being from another department gave me a certain advantage in that I wasn't seen as the enemy to workers within the Department because I didn't have a perceived vested interest in taking over some job or whatever...they didn't see me as some kind of ambitious administrator or bureaucrat who'd be...taking over down the road.

It's amazing when you say "What skills do you need?" but I think a lot of it is just common sense. You can learn it in theory, maybe in textbooks or read John McKnight on community development and stuff like that but I think if you're just a person that listens, goes in, can meet people, speak openly with some kind of sincerity and really listen to people's issues...

V. Knowledge and Skills in the Field of Organizational Development

The next group of concepts pertains to the more technical (as compared to the interpersonal) aspects of working with the committee structure of the Initiative. The organizational structure of the Initiative has been designed and prescribed by the

Provincial Office of the Commissioner. Recruiting, training, and supporting the work of the committees and working groups has been largely the responsibility of the facilitators. The skills and knowledge relevant to this aspect of the work emerged largely in their description of skills and knowledge which they brought with them from previous jobs.

> (One of my previous jobs) was recreation development, setting up local recreation boards, showing them how to get involved at the municipal level, showing them how to write proposals, for projects and stuff like that...More of a teaching role and very basic...It was supposed to be just recreation but it ended up they would ask me stuff about business, about this. I would say, "I don't know, but I'll find out." So I would come back and find out where all the different government departments were at so I'd give it back to them.
>
> ... They had to have a five year master plan in place. So those were some of the things I assisted with the small communities...Yes, walking them through the process, getting people to come in at community level, do a workshop on how to do this.
>
> At (that agency)...it was an advisory committee that I worked very closely with. ...And they were like just a board that you would experience probably in a social service agency or an independent community-based kind of service delivery... although we were strictly educational, there were a whole bunch of other issues that they dealt with as well.

Having facilitated the establishment of organizational structure, the facilitators' next major technical function has been to assist those groups in carrying out extensive data gathering and information analysis. This was the phase of the Initiative with which my practicum coincided.

> ...for the last 5-7 years, I've been involved in a lot of policy analysis and work in that both from the education level point of view and also cross-departmental. And then as stuff was starting to unfold and things were starting to happen, the Commissioner's Office was coming in, got involved in doing some cross-departmental analysis, impact studies...internal things, like what happens to the school system, what would be the impact on kids in schools, if social services decrease their support to families by X number of dollars. So it's all those kinds of things and experiences that have helped, will help the kind of work that we're going to be doing...in terms of the sub-committee work, gathering information and analyzing it and so forth. It's also a framework, basically a broad

> understanding of issues across departments that I think is becoming increasingly useful for background information, knowledge and maybe interpretation...you can learn it, you can read about it, but it's another thing to have experienced it.

One of the most powerful tools in use today for data collection, synthesis, and analysis is, of course, the computer. As the volumes of information being collected by all levels of the committee structure began to converge at the Regional Office, the absence of computer hardware for the facilitators to use was just beginning to pose problems.

> If I had my own computer I could do a lot more just working myself and it's not worth the hassle to try to find which one (is available for use).... I've been used to having my own computer for the last four years and so I feel like I've taken a step backwards in that way.

VI. Formal Education

Most of those interviewed commented upon their formal training or formal knowledge base when asked to describe the knowledge and skills which they have brought with them to their new roles. As a group, they represented a considerable investment in formal, academic education. Their shared list of credentials included:

> B. A. (Community Social Psychology), B.A. (Psychology), B.A. and M. Ed.(Special Education), M. A. (Counselling Psychology), and B.S.W.

Formal training in Community Development was referred to in the interview transcripts. However, none of those interviewed listed this as knowledge which they brought with them. Rather, knowledge and skills which form part of the field of Community Development were learned through experience and through other formal educational sources.

> ...I was by myself and I had no idea. In fact, I didn't know I was doing community development until later. In fact, until I applied for this job, I had not done anything officially known as Community Development. And

> yet when I look at the community development material and look at the elements and aspects of community development, I say, "Oh I've been doing that in different places in different ways...I think a lot of the work in terms of studying the feminist theories, individual empowerment, transfers quite nicely to community development so I think that's probably where I get some of my skills and awareness...

It is hoped that the preceding categorization of themes and sub-themes accurately portrays the skills and knowledge which those interviewed intended to communicate. It would have been helpful to have received more feedback from the participants as to the accuracy of the schema which emerged in my analysis of the transcripts. However, in the absence of such feedback, it is hoped that this description "makes sense" to you, the reader.

Chapter 5

I. The Practicum Student's Dilemma

While in the midst of developing the proposal for what eventually became this practicum, I was warned by a faculty member that doing a practicum might mean doing a practicum and then writing a thesis about it. Because the Master of Social Work Program at the University of Northern British Columbia is in its infancy, the requirements and standards of the practicum route were not well established, even as I was completing the placement.

I have been determined not to produce a thesis in the writing of this practicum report. Yet, as I began to pull together my various notes, transcripts, and documents, I realized that I had far too much information to analyze than a practicum report would warrant. Thus I encountered the qualitative researcher's dilemma of choosing what to use and what to leave behind. Even today, as I look back over the pages and pages of material I have gathered, I pine for the time and energy to add more, to do justice to those who took time from their hectic schedules to contribute to my learning. I hope that each of the participants will take pride in noting that the schema that emerged is uniquely theirs, even if they do not see their own exact words in the quotes provided.

II. The Region 8 and 10 Schema

The schema of skills and knowledge that has been drawn from the interview transcripts of this practicum is outlined in Table 1. It is interesting to note that while many of the concepts are similar to those identified in the initial literature review, the emphasis

on particular groups of skills and knowledge, and the combination of elements comprise a schema that is different from those previously presented. The importance of contextual

Table 1. Skills and Knowledge for Community-Based Practice

I. Contextual Knowledge
   a. Work experience in a range of localities
   b. Work experience in a range of human services/roles
   c. Knowledge of and experience working with previous initiatives
   d. Knowledge of the history and structure of Alberta Family and Social Services
   e. Awareness of and ability to work within government culture and protocol
   f. Knowledge of Who's Who in Alberta Family and Social Services
   g. Comparative knowledge of the Regions
   h. Identifying and working with sources of resistance

II. Knowledge and Skills Relevant to Work With the Aboriginal Community
   a. Knowledge of the history of Alberta's aboriginal peoples
   b. Awareness of the impact of aboriginal history on oneself and others
   c. Knowledge of and respect for aboriginal cultures
   d. Willingness and ability to address racism and personal prejudice
   e. Ability to work in a multi-cultural context
   f. Work experience with aboriginal communities and organizations

III. Workplace Survival Skills
   a. Ability to advocate for oneself and one's colleagues
   b. Ability to cope with the hours of work
   c. Ability to cope with ambiguity of the process and role
   d. Ability to assess and meet one's own learning needs
   e. Knowing when and how to participate
   f. Ability to focus on long-term and unclear outcomes
   g. Ability to work as part of a team
   h. Ability to organize and accomplish the workload

IV. Interpersonal Skills
   a. Ability to develop working relationships with participants
   b. Ability to assist groups in developing a shared code of conduct
   c. Ability to establish and redefine one's roles and functions within each group
   d. Knowledge of individual human behavior as it impacts group behavior
   e. Ability to deal with conflict within and between groups
   f. Ability to facilitate meetings to obtain optimum participation

V. Knowledge and Skills in the Field of Organizational Development
   a. Recruitment, training and support for committees and working groups
   b. Data collection and information analysis
   c. Computer skills

VI. Formal Education
   a. University education in human services related fields
   b. Training in Community Development

knowledge as the foundation for proactive practice received primary emphasis. Skills and knowledge relevant to work with the Aboriginal community were identified as core elements of effective practice, unlike most previously developed schema. Workplace survival skills, a topic rarely addressed in formal educational settings, were also strongly represented in this schema.

The skills and knowledge which these "community practitioners" have described is grounded in their experience of doing the day to day work of the Initiative, a "top-down" planning process which they were helping to transform into a more community-driven, community-responsive process. The schema as presented is descriptive of their practice as a group, in their current employment setting. Yet it also provides us with some insights into the skills and knowledge which may be most relevant to other, more community-based settings.

III. Practicum Objectives and Research Questions Revisited

This practicum has provided me with the opportunity to learn the use of action research methods in a multidisciplinary practice setting. It is perhaps a risky endeavor to enter a fast-paced work environment and attempt to apply a research methodology even as one is learning it. The analogy that comes to mind is that of a novice runner who, upon seeing a team in the midst of a race, decides to join the team and "help out" as a means of learning and refining her own technique. To their credit, the people in the host setting accepted this challenge and willingly participated in the various research tasks which I introduced into their day to day work. They also allowed opportunities to participate actively in their work and then reflect upon my own practice skills as a social worker.

IV. Have The Research Questions Been Addressed?

The critical question in any research project report is "Have the original questions of the project been answered?" The Region 8 and 10 schema provides an overview of the skills and knowledge which a group of professionals, including a Registered Social Worker, have used or might use in their involvement with the redesign of services to children, families and communities in Alberta. Every attempt has been made to ensure that these skills and knowledge are relayed to the reader in the words of those interviewed. Thus, the first two questions of the research aspect of the practicum have been addressed.

This researcher, in analyzing the content of the interview transcripts, did not identify skills and knowledge that were unique to professional social workers involved in the project, when compared to those identified by the other participants. Beyond formal education, there were commonalties for each topic with one or more of the other participants.

Several explanations for this commonality are possible. First, these professional social workers were being employed to carry out the same job functions and tasks as their colleagues. Thus, their description of relevant skills and knowledge would predictably echo those of their colleagues. Secondly, the social workers interviewed may not have identified themselves as strongly with the profession as others might. Thus the commonality might be an indication of individual traits rather than professional traits. Finally, the social work profession draws concepts and strategies from many other disciplines. The commonalties of the social workers' responses with the responses of the other participants may well reflect the eclectic nature of the social work profession.

V. Insights for the Social Work Profession

As the work of the Children's Services Initiative progresses, there will be increasing demand for social workers to work collaboratively with other professionals and with community members in the broadest definition. Social workers and their collaborators will be challenged to ensure that the services which emerge out of the Initiative are appropriate and effective in meeting the needs of children, families and communities. They will also be challenged to work as part of the community, rather than as outside experts, on very real problems which our communities are facing in providing support to children, families, and communities at risk.

Knowing the context, at the provincial, regional, and community level, will continue to be essential in determining when and how to participate, and what "interventions" to choose, to ensure that the profession makes a meaningful contribution to the change process underway. It is also essential to addressing potential problems and issues in a proactive, rather than reactive manner.

The facilitators spoke eloquently to the very real opportunities and challenges in working in new ways with aboriginal individuals, communities, and Nations. For perhaps the first time in our province's history, people in many diverse settings have been either allowed or required to dialogue across "dominant culture - aboriginal" boundaries. This has not been an easy process, for individuals, agencies, or communities. Their insights may be of help to social workers as we struggle to address the lack of diversity within our profession and our practice.

The connection between the person and the environment, and a focus on the relationship between private troubles and public issues, are core elements of social work

as it is conceptualized in Alberta today. Understanding and working skillfully in the areas of interpersonal relationships, group dynamics, and community participation in the development of policy and programs, are components of community work skills and knowledge which the profession shares with others. As social workers are called upon more and more to work in teams with other professionals rather than with other social workers, we will continue to be challenged to articulate what it is that is core to social work practice and what is common ground.

Inherent in the work of the Children's Services Initiative has been the critique of "social work" as a field of practice and as a formal profession, particularly in relation to Child Welfare systems. This has not been an easy process, though many would argue that it has been necessary. Surviving in the work place, as a social worker, will continue to be a challenge for the foreseeable future. Examining the skills and knowledge that assist us in that task may be as essential to our transition to more community-based models of practice as any of the other skills and knowledge we possess.

VI. Final Comments

"What is social work?" and "What makes social workers tick?" have been questions of interest to me since I encountered my first bonafide social worker. Since the initial announcement regarding the Children's Services Initiative, I have wondered what it was all about and what it might mean for "social workers", including myself. This practicum experience gave me a wonderful opportunity to explore all of these questions while also expanding and refining skills and knowledge for my practice of the profession.

The practicum route allowed me the opportunity to spend most of my time working with others, rather than in the isolation which many thesis students encounter. The choice of Action Research as a framework around which to build the practicum was a good one. It gave a form around which to fit the busy-ness in which I found myself and it allowed me to participate in the depth of the Initiative's activities in an unobtrusive, acceptable way. As a result, I am sure that I learned far more than I contributed at the Region 8 and 10 Office.

In hindsight, it appears that an important step in the Action Research process is missing from this practicum. A first cycle of this research process was completed. However, the important next step of bringing the emerging schema of skills and knowledge back to the facilitators for re-application and reflection could not be accomplished within the timelines of the practicum. Questions which might have been explored further, had time and circumstances allowed, include: Does the schema as presented in Table 1 accurately reflect the work of the facilitators beyond the brief "snapshot" of the practicum? How might the greater self-awareness of the facilitators as to the skills and knowledge they are applying to their work affect the future directions of that work? Are the skills and knowledge they are applying leading to the results that they and their working communities had hoped for? Why or why not? Could this schema be used in the retraining/reorientation of government workers recommended in the original Action Plan of the Initiative?

For now, the first cycle of this particular Action Research project is complete. Further involvement with the staff of the Region 8 and 10 Office is not possible due to distance and other commitments. I have returned to paid work as an Alberta social

worker. I find myself working in a newly created position, funded through the Early Intervention Program of the Children's Services Initiative.

I now have the opportunity to test how the schema of skills and knowledge which have been drawn from the experiences of the Initiative's facilitators relate to day to day practice in the type of community-based practice setting envisioned by the Initiative. And within the first few weeks of this new cycle, I am confronting *the* fundamental policy and practice challenge of the Initiative. The Ministry of Alberta Family and Social Services has decided that the budget for the Early Intervention component of the Initiative will reduced by approximately one-third in 1998-1999. This means that in the third year of operation, many of the new, community-based services to children, families, and communities will loose their funding and cease to exist.

The implications of this decision are very serious. The Early Intervention component of the Initiative was established to produce visible results of the work of the Initiative, prior to establishment of the new Regional Authorities. At present, the projects funded through Early Intervention are the only tangible results of the many hours of effort which Albertans have contributed to the work of the Initiative. And despite a complex and bureaucratic approval process, many innovative and progressive community-based services are now up and running.

The collapse of up to one third of these new community resources will confirm the worst suspicions of many regarding the underlying purpose of the Children's Services Initiative. People, particularly members of the aboriginal community, have been convinced of the value of working within the parameters of the Initiative. A degree of trust and belief in the potential for meaningful changes to how the needs of children, families and

communities are met in our Province has been developed. If this trust and belief is again undermined, all Albertans will experience the repercussions for many years to come.

Efforts are presently underway to create the political will to reverse this very significant funding decision. I conclude this report with the very sincere wish that the hard work and sacrifice of my host agency and the many volunteer committee members of the Initiative will ultimately result in improved quality of life for all Alberta children, families, and communities. At the very least, I hope this report helps to document the many fine qualities of their work during these times of restructuring.

Appendix I

Task Roles for Community Practitioners

System Maintenance	Planning Activities	Enabling Relationships	Mobilizing Initiatives	Innovative Tasks	Interpretation and Education
Implementing Tasks: regulations, policies, administrative procedures Managing Tasks: fiscal aspects, funding, budgeting, physical facilities Archival Tasks: files, records, historical material, information retrieval Arrangement Tasks: meetings and conferences	Social welfare program design Priority rating of community needs Standard-setting for social services Planning strategies of change Research as an aid to problem-solving Evaluation of services and programs	Interactional Tasks: mediating, promoting, brokerage, intergroup process Individualized relationships with council members and subgroups Catalyst for decision-making and problem-solving processes Expertise and social therapy	Organizing Fundraising Social action Community participation Interagency co-ordination	Leadership development Developing new program directions based on new knowledge Contributing to theory development New approaches to practice Keeping staff and sponsors informed of new methodology	Public Relations: contact with public media, publications, publicity Orientation to various publics associated with the agency Education via institutes, workshops and conferences Volunteer training Prevention of social pathology via mass education

Source: Lappin, B. (1985). Community development: Beginnings in social work enabling. In S.H. Taylor & R.W. Roberts (Eds.), Theory and practice of community social work. p. 68.

Appendix II

Process and Task-Oriented Domains

Process Domain

A. Managing Organizational Processes
   1. Initial Organizing
   2. Participation
   3. Committee technology
   4. Leadership development and training

B. Exerting Influence
   5. Coalitions and their formation
   6. Bargaining
   7. Advocate role and conflict
   8. Broker role
   9. Identifying and influencing the power structure

C. Conducting Interpersonal Relations
   10. Interviewing
   11. Use of self
   12. Leading group discussion

Technical or Task-Oriented Domain

A. Designing
   13. Fact-finding, needs assessment and social-survey techniques
   14. Policy analysis
   15. Program development

B. Expediting
   16. Decision-making techniques
   17. Political liaison
   18. Legislative drafting and enactment
   19. Administrative procurement

C. Implementing
   20. Administrative role and function
   21. Fund raising and proposal writing
   22. Consultation
   23. Staff development and supervision
   24. Promotional, educational and public relations techniques
   25. Evaluation

Source: Rothman, G.L., & Zald, M.N. (1985). Planning theory in social work community practice. In S.H. Taylor & R.W. Roberts (Eds.), Theory and practice in community social work. p. 143.

Appendix III

Taxonomy of Community Practice Skills and Knowledge

Skills and Knowledge Base Suggested	References
training self and others in cultural awareness and sensitivity, intergroup interaction and social action	Lane, M. (1990) Community work with immigrant groups. Australian Social Work, 43(3): 33-38. Chau, K.L. (1991) Social work with ethnic minorities: practice issues and potentials. Journal of Multicultural Social Work, 1(1): 23-39. Daley, J.M.; Wong, P. (1994) Community development with emerging ethnic communities. Journal of Community Practice, 1(1): 9-24. Mowry, D.D. (1994) Mentoring the Hmong: a practice outlet for teaching faculty and a possible community development tool. Journal of Community Practice, 1(1): 107-12. Grant, D.; Haynes, D. (1995) A developmental framework for cultural competence training with children. Social Work in Education, 17 (3): 171-82.
learning and updating the skills and knowledge to do community work	Frans, D.J. (1993). A scale for measuring social worker empowerment. Research on Social Work Practice, 3(3): 312-28. Globerman, J. (1993) Teaching critical appraisal of the social work literature. Journal of Teaching Social Work, 7(2): 63-80. Wodarski, J.S.; Feit, M.; Green, R.K. (1995) Graduate social work education: a review of two decades. Social Service Review, 69(1): 106-30.
legislative advocacy, policy analysis, lobby work	Dixon, J. (1993) Feminist community work's ambivalence with politics. Australian Social Work, 46(1): 22-27. Powell, J.Y.; Causby, V.D. (1993) From the classroom to the capital. Journal of Teaching Social Work, 9(1-2): 141-67.

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task force work skills	Johnson, A.K. (1994) Teaching students the task force approach: a policy-practice course. Journal of Social Work Education, 30(3): 336-47.
integration of group work (therapeutic) and community work (organizing, empowerment)	Cnaan, R.A.; Adar,H. (1987) An integrative model for group work in community organization practice. Social Work With Groups, 10(3): 5-24. Mondros, J.B.; Berman-Rossi, T. (1991) The relevance of stages of group development theory to community organization practice. Social Work With Groups, 14(3-4): 203-21. Regan. S.; Lee, G. (1992) The interplay among social group work, community work and social action. Social Work With Groups, 15(1): 35-50. Johnson, A.K.; Castengera, A.R. (1994) Integrated program development: a model for meeting the complex needs of homeless persons. Journal of Community Practice, 1(3): 29-47.
gender specific organizing, consciousness raising, gender-sensitive skills and methods, feminist and masculist practice methods	Valentich, M. (1992) Toward gender-sensitive clinical social work practice. Arete, 17(1): 1-12. Gutierrez, L.M.; Lewis, E.A. (1994) Community organizing with women of color: a feminist approach. Journal of Community Practice, 1(2): 23-44.
animation, resocialization to learned hopefulness and motivation to act, creating and sustaining radical hope	Leonard, P. (1979) In defense of critical hope. Social Work Today, 10(24): 21-23. Joseph, B.R. (1986) Taking organizing back to the people. Smith College Studies in Social Work, 56(2): 122-31. Breton, M. (1994) On the meaning of empowerment and empowerment-oriented social work practice. Social Work With Groups, 17(3): 23-37. Pecukonis, E.V.; Wenocur, S. (1994) Perceptions of self and collective efficacy in community organization theory and practice. Journal of Community Practice, 1(2): 5-21. Moxley, D.P.; Jacobs, D.R. (1995) The role of animation as a program development strategy. Administration in Social Work, 19 (1): 1-13.

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strategies for preventing resistance	Tse, J.W.L. (1995) Resistance to community-based learning disability facilities: implications for prevention. Community Development Journal, 30(1): 83-91.
class analysis, engaging the "underclass" in community action, change	Pollio, D. (1994) Wintering at the Earle: group structures in the street community. Social Work With Groups, 17(1-2): 47-70. Figueira-McDonough, J. (1995) Community organization and the underclass: exploring new practice directions. Social Service Review, 69 (1): 57-85.
assessment models/tools for identifying and defining community strengths, community characteristics	Sorter, B.W. (1987) Community development analysis through behavioral patterns. Journal of the Community Development Society, 18(2): 42-53. Sampson, R.J. (1991) Linking the micro- and macro-level dimension of community social organisation. Social Forces, 70(1): 43-64. Alcorn, S.; Morrison, J.D. (1994) Community planning that is "caught" and "taught": experiential learning from town meetings. Journal of Community Practice, 1(4): 27-4. Rosenthal, S.J.; Cairns, J.M. (1994) Child abuse prevention: the community as co-worker. Journal of Community Practice, 1(4): 45-61.
getting work	Mondros, J.B., Wilson, S.M. (1990) Staying alive: career selection and sustenance of community organizers. Administration in Social Work, 14(2): 95-109.
marketization of social services, social marketing, constituency building, creative resource budgeting and packaging, policy development, financial management, public-private partnerships, coordination, program design and evaluation, job marketing and development	Poole, D.L.; Theilen, G. (1985) Community planning and organization in the era of retrenchment: structural and educational approaches to serving human need. Journal of Social Work Education, 21(3): 16-27. Stoner, M.R. (1986) Marketing of social services gains prominence in practice. Administration in Social Work, 10(4): 41-52.

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organizational development and related technologies, organizer-manager activities	Austin, M.J. (1986) Community organization and social administration: partnership or irrelevance. Administration in Social Work, 10(3), 27-39. Bailey, D. (1992) Organizational change in a public school system: the synergism of two approaches. Social Work in Education, 14(2): 94-105. Bailey, D. Chatterjee, P. (1992) Organization development and community development: true soulmates or uneasy bedfellows? Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare, 19(2): 17-25. Packard, T. (1992) Organization development technologies in community development: a case study. Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare, 19(2): 17-21.
evaluation of community practice work	Stucker, J.R. (1986) The community development demonstration project--Guam: a case study. (Berkeley University, DSW). Lackey, A.S.; Burke, R.; Peterson, M. (1987) Healthy communities: the goal of community development. Journal of the Community Development Society, 18(2): 1-17. York, A.S.; Itzhaky, H. (1991) How can we measure the effects of client participation on the effectiveness of social work intervention? The British Journal of Social Work, 21(6): 647-61. Shields, J.J. (1992) Evaluating community organization projects: the development of an empirically based measure. Social Work Research and Abstracts, 28(2): 15-20.
conflict resolution, mediation	Payton, J.W. (1982) Mediation solves neighborhood disputes. Practice Digest, 4(4): 18-22. Kauffman, S.E. (1992) The causes of conflict and methods of resolution in a citizen participation program. (Bryn Mawr College Ph.D. Dissertation).
doing community practice from an institutional setting	Cason, C.S.; Fletcher, B. (1985) Sensitive matters. Catalyst, 5(17-18): 35-43.

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interpersonal skills, use of self	Henderson, P.; Thomas, D.N. (1982) Skills in neighbourhood work. Australian Social Work, 35(2): 33-37. Rivera, F.G. (1990) The way of Bushido in community organization work. Administration in Social Work, 14(2):43-61.
advocacy models of social planning and program development, restructuring services to be community-based	Martinez-Brawley, E.E. (1986) The role of social work in integrated rural development: international illustrations from industrial nations. Social Development Issues, 10(1): 28-40. Price, L.D. (1987) Global neighbourhoods. Social Development Issues, 11(1): 49-55. Kaye, L.W.; Albert, R. (1990) The technology of social planning and program development: an advocacy training model for professional social workers. Journal of Teaching Social Work, 4(1): 101-12. Cohen, M.B. (1994) Overcoming obstacles to forming empowerment groups: a consumer advisory board for homeless clients. Social Work, 39(6); 742-49.
economic conversion, community economic planning and development	Burghardt, S. (1984) Towards a new conception of grass roots organizing: resolving the dilemmas of reindustrialization and debureacratization through class-based activism. Social Development Issues, 8(3): 89-102. Smith, T. (1990) Literature review: community work, the inner city and jobs. British Journal of Social Work, 20(3): 253-62. Midgley, J. (1993) Promoting a development focus in the community organization curriculum: relevance of the African experience. Journal of Social Work Education, 29(3): 269-78.

Appendix IV

The Four Pillars of the Children's Services Initiative

Integrated Services

In order to better meet the diverse needs of children in this province, services must be integrated. The action plan proposes that services throughout the province become part of a local integrated service plan in order to receive funding. It is not sufficient to merely coordinate activities--rather, organizations must learn to work within one plan and focus on a single set of goals.

By streamlining the administration of hundreds of funded agencies and various departments, the plan will result in a reallocation of administrative costs over the next three years. It is proposed that these dollars be redirected to children and families.

Community Delivery

Services must be provided to children in their own families and communities. As part of the plan, government will move out of direct delivery of children's services over the next three years.

The action plan proposes that new Local Authorities be established to be responsible for designing and managing all children's services in their area. Agencies should deliver these services based on contracts tendered through an open, competitive process. In order to test new program ideas, demonstration projects should also be funded.

Communities include service recipients, family members, and concerned citizens and they should be involved in all aspects of planning, decision making, service delivery, and monitoring. This includes the development of processes which involve family and community members in critical decisions about children, particularly where these decisions may result in the removal of a child from family or community.

Government employees should be assisted and be given every opportunity to find new employment opportunities in community services. To prepare staff for the future, government should initiate training and orientation programs which provide staff with the knowledge and skills to work in a community based delivery system.

Improved Aboriginal Services

It is necessary to ensure that effective and culturally sensitive services are developed and are available to meet the needs of Aboriginal children.

The action plan proposes that the responsibility for planning and delivering services for Aboriginal children and families be transferred to Aboriginal communities. Joint ventures

among Aboriginal organizations, and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organizations, should be encouraged.

The timetable for the transition to delegated authority must be determined in accordance with the wishes and capacities of Aboriginal community groups, with input from elders and community leaders. The request of Aboriginal people to be fully involved in any changes that are made to existing programs must also be honoured.

Focus on Early Intervention

Children and families require more than crisis intervention. Energies must be redirected to helping families in a proactive way before serious problems arise.

Early intervention activities help families and children develop skills that will benefit them throughout their lives. Decisions about specific early intervention and prevention strategies must focus on what works, and benefit from the input of recipients of service and communities. In the Aboriginal context, programs involving community healing circles and the participation of elders have also demonstrated their effectiveness.

Communities must be encouraged to assist their member families. The development of strong, caring communities is key to preventing family isolation and breakdown.

The action plan proposes that there be a significant reallocation of funds from existing government programs over the next three years to develop early intervention programs and initiatives.

By increasing early intervention programs over the next three years, there will be a significant reduction in the number of children in care in residential facilities, foster homes, correctional centres, and group homes. The cost savings in these areas over the next three years should be redirected to early intervention programs.

In the long term, effective early intervention programming will reduce the overall costs of providing children's services.

Source: Commissioner of Services for Children (1994). Focus on children: A plan for effective, integrated community services for children and their families. pp. 9-11.

Appendix V

Action Plan of the Children's Services Initiative

Phase 1: Mobilization
December 1994 to March 1995

It is proposed that the first phase of the action plan involve a four-month period to mobilize communities and begin the planning process with communities and government departments.

The Office of the Commissioner should have a strong mandate to implement change and should be the responsibility centre for the development of a community planning process. This responsibility would be carried out in close cooperation with other departments and agencies. The purpose of the Office of the Commissioner would be to mobilize leadership to integrate and consolidate resources, capacities, and energies for the greater well-being of Alberta's children and their families.

It is proposed that a lead Minister within Cabinet be charged with responsibility for the implementation of the government's direction. This would reflect the high priority the provincial government places on children and it would provide a strong voice for children's issues. The plan proposes that the Lead Minister be the Minister of Family and Social Services who also has responsibility for Aboriginal Affairs.

Phase 1: Mobilization
December 1994 - March 1995

Action	Timeline
1. Reaffirm the mandate of the Commissioner	Dec/94
2. Integrate services under a lead Minister	Complete Dec/94
3. Integrate planning among departments	Begin Dec/94
4. Develop a Centre for Service Innovation	Begin Dec/94
5. Expand consultation and design Aboriginal	Begin Dec/94
6. Establish regional and local working groups	Complete Mar/95
7. Begin work on service plans	Begin Dec/94

Phase 2: Implementation
April 1995 to March 1996

Once the initial plans are developed in Phase 1, it is proposed that the second phase focus on making things happen. The communities which have completed initial service plans should be ready for implementation.

During this phase, it is expected that communities would continue to identify priorities and refine their planning processes. Communities would also begin shifting resources, consolidating services, and focusing on early intervention during this phase.

Phase 2: Implementation
April 1995 - March 1996

Action	Timeline
1. Approve and implement initial local service plans	Begin June/95
2. Approve and implement initial service plans in Aboriginal communities	Begin June/95
3. Implement joint ventures with Aboriginal groups	Begin June/95
4. Allocate funds to integrated early intervention programs	Begin June/95
5. Identify additional required reforms	Complete Mar/96
6. Develop ongoing systems for quality management and evaluation	Complete Mar/96

Phase 3: Community Management
April 1996 and Onward

This phase will complete the transition to community management. During this time, significant results will be apparent in terms of the effectiveness of services and overall cost savings.

It is proposed that during Phase 3, communities assume responsibility for the long-term management of their own services.

As the transition is completed, the provincial government will have fully transferred the responsibilities for allocation of program funds and human resources to the new local Authorities. The provincial government's primary function would then be to provide overall direction and to maintain responsibility for policies, funding, monitoring, and evaluation.

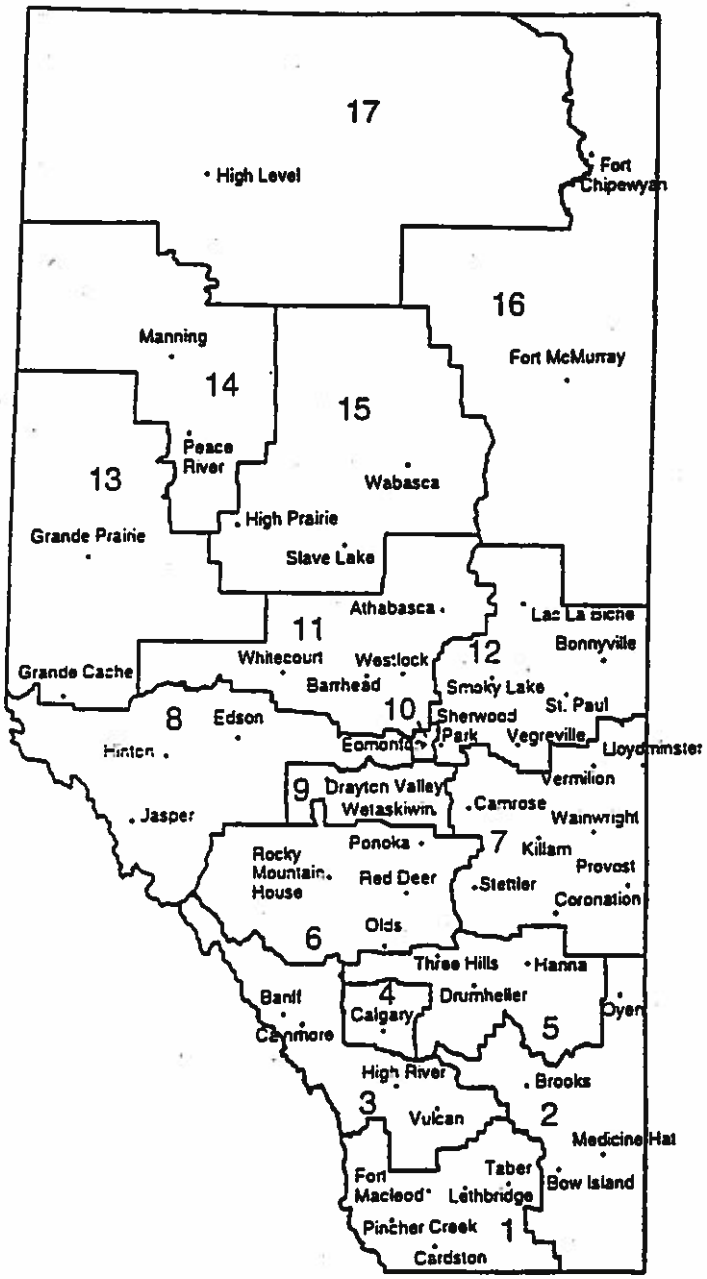
Phase 3: Community Management
April 1996 and Onward

Action	Timeline
1. Approve and implement proposals for establishing Local Authorities	Begin Apr/96
2. Approve and complete transition to Aboriginal managed services	Begin Apr/96
3. Allocate further funds for integrated early intervention services Redirect savings	Begin Apr/96
4. Enact legislation	Complete Mar/97

Source: Commissioner of Services for Children (1994). Focus on children: A plan for effective, integrated community services for children and families. pp. 15-26.

Appendix VI

Map of the Planning Regions for the Children's Services Initiative



Source: Commissioner of Services for Children (1995). Laying the foundation: A guide for planning children's services in Alberta. p. 5.

Appendix VII

Summary of Practicum Activities

- Orientation, individual discussions with staff of host agency about their work with the initiative and where I fit into the work as a social work practicum student
- Regular Steering Committee meetings of Region 10 and Region 8
- Region 8 consultation with a key contact from the Child Welfare Appeals panel
- Region 10 Working Groups: West Edmonton Working Group open house, Foster Parents Working Group regular meeting, Edmonton Aboriginal Coalition Working Group regular meeting
- Region 10 Steering Committee Subcommittee Meetings
- Region 10 Unit and Transition Team (Region 8 and 10 staff) meetings
- Region 8 and Region 10 Steering Committee meetings with the Minister for Children's Services
- Capital Health Authority, Child and Adolescent Abuse Subcommittee
- Focus Groups: Region 10 - Service Providers to Immigrant Women re: Family Violence, Region 8 - Biological Children of Foster Parents and Youth in Foster Care
- Supervision: practicum field supervision with Margot Herbert, Practicum Supervisory Committee teleconferences, host supervision with Hugh Nicholson
- Region 8 and Region 10 Steering Committee Retreats
- Formal interviews with host agency staff
- Consultation regarding Region 10 Handicapped Children's Services Subcommittee report
- Participation in preparation of the Northeast Working Group service area report (Region 10)
- Organization and facilitation of the Business Community Forum (Region 10)
- Drafting and circulation of initial chapters of the Practicum Report
- Theming activity with Region 8 and Region 10 staff
- Participation in day to day activities of the Regional Office

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